

A RADICAL PAST: THE LEGACY OF THE FIFE MINERS.

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The undersigned hereby declares that the thesis contained herein is the result of research and composition undertaken solely by herself.

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## ABSTRACT.

The study engages with the existing literature on radical working-class consciousness. It is held that both historical and sociological explanations have been simplistic in two main areas. It is argued that they have given unsophisticated accounts of the relationship between objective and subjective conditions of existence and that, consequently, have failed to reveal the ways in which a broad social imagery may, or may not, be related to an overtly political world view. Further, it is maintained that accounts have been static, with little attention to the development of radical consciousness among groups of workers over time, or of the role of historical awareness in the creation of radical identities and beliefs.

The location of radicals within space and time is thus central to the study. In order to explicate the issues of concern a group of workers with a tradition of radical activity was located; the Fife miners. The analysis sought to offer a dynamic account of how changing objective circumstances have affected their radical stance, but also how a sense of history acts as a legacy helping produce radical identities and beliefs over time. Examination was made of how the miners were tied into the regional and occupational history through familial ties, and attempts were made to discover how, even among a radical group, different elements show varying degrees of political awareness.

Four main areas were identified as crucial mechanisms acting both as the content, and means of reproduction, of the legacy; work, community, industrial organisation and relations, and the form of political institutions. Having examined how experiences within, and historical knowledge of, these areas act to produce radical identity and consciousness, analysis then focused on the 1984-85 strike and its aftermath to explore how the historical legacy is mobilised in time and space, and how objective circumstances then act back to affect subjective understandings and attitudes.

It was discovered that it is among those most tied into the occupational and regional history that greater radical consciousness and historical awareness can be found, and that it is such workers who have best been able to sustain their identity, beliefs and morale in the last few years, during which the Fife miners have witnessed the virtual demise of their industry.



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## CONTENTS.

List of Abbreviations.	1
Glossary of Terms.	2
1. The Nature of the Debate.	3
2. A Radical Region: The Fife Miners.	29
3. Time and Radical Consciousness.	64
4. Occupational Identity: The Experience of the Pit.	89
5. The Mining Community: A World within the World.	120
6. Of Miners and their Union...	152
7. ... And Management and Men.	176
8. The Role of the Communist Party.	205
9. The 1984-85 Strike: Living-Up to the Past?	246
10. The Aftermath: Contradictions Revealed.	289
11. Conclusion.	316
Epilogue.	336
Footnotes.	337
Bibliography.	348

# ABBREVIATIONS.

BC	British Coal.
CCW	Cowdenbeath Central Workshops.
COSA	Colliery Office Staffs Association.
CP	Communist Party.
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain.
FCKMA	Fife, Clackmannan and Kinross Miners' Association.
FKCMA	Fife, Kinross and Clackmannan Miners' Association.
FMRU	Fife Miners' Reform Union.
ILP	Independent Labour Party.
MFGB	Miners' Federation of Great Britain.
NACODS	National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers.
NCB	National Coal Board.
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers.
NUSMW	National Union of Scottish Mineworkers.
SCEBTA	Scottish Colliery Enginemen, Boilermen and Tradesmens' Association.
TUC	Trades Union Congress.
YCL	Young Communist League.
UDM	Union of Democratic Mineworkers.
UMS	United Mineworkers of Scotland.
YCL	Young Communist League.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS.

aye	all, always.
awfy	awful.
baffies	soft shoes.
bing	slag heap.
boggies	manriding underground trains.
cage	lift carrying men and materials underground.
claes	clothes.
cry	to call, name.
Dubbie	local name for the Frances Colliery.
forrad	forward.
gaffer	deputies underground.
graith	pit tools.
messages	shopping.
mind	remember.
scab	strike breaker.
stour	coal dust.
the	to; as in 'the day' - 'today'.
they	those.
ticket	used generally to refer to colliery qualifications.
yes	you, [plural].

## VOWEL CHANGES.

a	for o	from, home, long, off, work, etc.
ae	for o	go, no, to, etc.
ai	for a	after, carry, hard, regard, start, etc.
ai	for o	more, own, etc.
e	for a	family, jacket, sacked, starved, etc.
ei	for ea	dead, head, etc.
ey	for a	father, etc.
o	for a	any, hand, stand, etc.
oo	for ou/w	hours, now, ours, etc.
u	for o	for, your, etc.
ui	for oo	blood, good, etc.



## CHAPTER ONE.

## THE NATURE OF THE DEBATE.

1.1 Introduction.

The analysis of working-class consciousness and action is an area fraught with difficulties. Dealing with the subjective orientations of actors in history, it is vulnerable to poorly elucidated conceptualisation, and the accusation that studies fail to grasp the complexity of motivation and intention underlying thought and action. It is an area in which researchers have engaged in energetic debate, seeking to formulate rigorous classifications of what is to count as valid expressions of workers' aspirations and activities, the relationship of these to the material world, and the means of operationalising research which can adequately untangle the complex interaction between the two. As subjects, we are all too often aware of the elusiveness of the meanings behind our actions. For historians and sociologists, concerned to establish the foundations, orientations and general patterns underlying the action of social groups, such problems multiply and intensify. Too frequently generalisations about identity, consciousness and action tread a knife-edge between enhancing our understandings of collectivities and reducing them to simplistic master statuses; static descriptions caught in the garish light of academic enquiry.

1.2 The Marxist Legacy.

Much of the difficulty lies in the theorisation for class consciousness and social action outlined by Marx, whose work provides the departure point for most literature in the field. The weaknesses contained within his formulation have been so fully detailed by others that they hardly require a further elucidation here. Rather, attention will be briefly paid to the two aspects which most clearly relate to the points of contention

which inform the study, and which underlie the ensuing debates referred to in this chapter.

Both elements are directly concerned with the consequences for theorisations on class consciousness resultant upon Marx's conceptualisation of historical materialism. To summarise, within this formulation, consciousness is determined by the experiences within the objective world; that is, thought is created within, and in reaction to, existing social relations. This consciousness then informs social action. Yet the material world is not solely determining, for whilst objective conditions shape subjective consciousness, they are changeable by human action. Marx argued:-

In the development of productive forces there comes a stage when productive forces and means of intercourse are brought into being, which, under the existing relationships, only cause mischief, and are no longer productive but destructive forces [machinery and money]; and connected with this a class is called forth, which has to bear all the burdens of society without enjoying its advantages, which, ousted from society, is forced into the most decided antagonism to all other classes; a class which forms the majority of all members of society, and from which emanates the consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution, the communist consciousness[1].

Thus, at the very basis, objective and subjective conditions for existence are crucially inter-related, and it is this relationship that provides the dynamism for the historical dialectic, as actors are created by, and through their actions recreate, the society in which they live. Yet this consciousness is also an inherently political phenomenon for Marx, for it is the vital instrument through which the socialist revolution is brought, as the contradictions inherent within the capitalist system change the working class from a 'class in itself', the objective social group standing in the same relation to the mode of production, to a 'class for itself', aware of its mutual interest in opposition to the prevailing system, from which realisation comes the action that will radically transform society.



This somewhat crude outline serves to indicate the two main problematic areas, both of which contain fundamental weaknesses through their failure to explain fully the mechanisms involved. The first is intimately connected to two interrelated failings within the definitions concerning the foundation and content of class consciousness; namely, the nature of the relationship between the objective and the subjective, and the content of resultant consciousness. The monolithic movement of the 'class in itself' to the 'class for itself' as it comes to political awareness is essentially simplistic, for it allows for no gradation, ambiguity or complexity of belief. Such a conceptualisation assumes a total unity of motivation on the part of the working class in the striving for socialism, which can be seen to derive from the perception of consciousness as a mere reflection of objective circumstances; that is, actors are portrayed as reacting uniformly to the material world which determines their response. This supposed homogeneity of intent and performance is due to the unproblematic presentation of the relationship between the experiential and the political, and gives an uncredible and overly simple account of the relationship between the material world and consciousness and action, and the direction of the subjective, which creates problems for those seeking to utilise Marx' theoretical framework.

The second criticism relates to the apparant paradox that, at the same time as being a theory of history, historical materialism is, in certain aspects, ahistorical in its orientation; that is, whilst Marxist theory does refer to the use of history in shaping social action, there is not a detailed account of the relationship between temporal periods within the historical dialectic in relation to perceptual understandings; that is, that actors do not appear to formulate beliefs in the flow of time. That Marx views social action as the outcome of historical configurations, and as acting to create history into the future can be seen from the following quotation:-

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it in circumstances chosen by



themselves, but under circumstances already encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language[2].

Thus the potentialities for action at any time are dictated by the circumstances which have been created as the result of previous actions, and may assume aspects of that past. However, in this account, this usage of the past appears to be viewed as a negative phenomenon for it is portrayed as the cynical manipulation of symbols for political ends which, Marx argues, demonstrates "how the class struggle in France created the circumstances and relationships that made it possible for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero's part[3]."

Yet within the larger theorisation, Marx appears to fail to envisualise how the use of the past may be drawn upon to create consciousness and identity, and provide the precedents for action within the flow of everyday life. There is no sense in which history is seen as contained and mobilised within the actuality of the lived experience of the worker. By relating subjective understandings directly into existing objective conditions, Marx's theory of historical materialism would thus seem to contain the additional failing of appearing to neglect the role of history and historical perception in the formation of consciousness; for actors act only in relation to existing conditions. Consequently, despite the implicit dynamism contained within the concept of the dialectic, the working class appears disengaged from the flow of history, in the longer term sense, and does not act reflexively in relation to the past, nor use that past to act. Yet again, this ambiguity has created problems for the study of consciousness and action, as shall be seen below.



### 1.3 Consciousness in History.

Such problems may be most readily perceived within historical studies which, it is believed, tend either to be theoretically implausible or simply descriptive. A classic example of the former is the work of John Foster which, in seeking to draw upon Marxist conceptualisation, ends up merely highlighting its inadequacies[4].

In Foster's analysis of nineteenth century Oldham, which he sees as characterising a classical picture of the development of industrial capitalism, he distinguishes between three periods displaying distinctive forms of class consciousness among the working class. Drawing upon Lenin's distinction between 'class consciousness' and 'labourism', Foster sees the 1800-1830 period as epitomising this latter, with a trade-union consciousness developing from the economic crisis of war which had undermined the infant capitalist authority system. From this the workers then moved on to a class consciousness, which he sees as involving an intellectual commitment to the destruction of the prevailing order, which developed between 1830-1850 in a period of economic crisis during which the working class were able to overcome sectionalism and false consciousness to be led by a revolutionary vanguard. This was followed by a period of quiescence resulting from economic revival and a bourgeois policy of 'liberalisation'. Central to this last was, following Engels, the creation of a 'labour aristocracy' from the ranks of the skilled working class.

Foster's use of the concept of the labour aristocracy is centrally-related to his acceptance of the historical dialectic, for if the working class was inevitably the instrument of the revolution, to which sentiments it was inexorably drawn during the capitalist crisis of the 1830s and 1840s, then the later period of relative harmony becomes a problem. This 'failure' is thus explained away through the erection of further theoretical constructs which facilitate this. Accepting the premises of working-class homogeneity and commitment to a socialist



philosophy, Foster argues that by awarding the labour aristocrats the economic rewards from export capital and giving them a greater control over other sections of the workforce, the new affluence and status led to a realignment of their social and political interests. Put simply, the vanguard was 'bought-off'. Thus, the labour aristocracy is used to explain both working-class revolutionary collapse and subsequent sectionalism, whilst at the same time providing the channel for the dominant ideology into the working class.

Foster's work has received detailed criticism from many sources, which set out a comprehensive critique not necessarily relevant to this debate[5]. What is of issue is that it is precisely due to the weaknesses inherent within the original Marxist formulation that Foster is drawn into the necessity of utilising further theories of dubious merit; for the concept of the 'labour aristocracy' is itself open to contention. As Stedman Jones argues, the definition is unclear and unsatisfactory in much Marxist writing:-

Its status is unclear and it has been employed at will, descriptively, polemically or theoretically, without ever finding a firm anchorage. Engels did not construct a theory of labour aristocracy, he took the term over from the everyday parlance of nineteenth century English trade-union debate. Since then, the term has often been used as if it provided an explanation. But it would be more accurate to say that it pointed towards a vacant area where an explanation should be[6].

Consequently, Foster's explanations lack a credibility which serves to undermine the total work, which is notable for the extensiveness of its quantitative analysis. Its basic importance lies, however, in that it reveals the necessity of overcoming the theoretical weaknesses of Marxist thought, but shows that this should be accomplished in such a way that does not merely lead to further inadequate conceptualisation. Much of Foster's problem lies in the uncritical adoption of the theoretical and political assumptions of Marxist theory. Price, for example, claims that Marxist theories of working-class consciousness and action are



judged against ideal standards concerning the historic role of that class which do not equate with actual working-class activity, and that this has been taken to reflect problems within that actuality. The adequacy of the theories themselves is not called into account. He argues:-

... the theory of working-class activity has not allowed for its assumptions to be altered or changed by the actuality of working-class self-activity. In other words, the limitations of working-class resistance are taken to reflect the inadequacies of the particular situation of the class itself, rather than the theories that are adduced to explain that activity[7].

Such issues are common ones for historians working in the area and relate directly to the fundamental problematic; namely, that historians concerned with class consciousness are dealing with a subjective phenomenon on the basis of objective data dealing with the particular era or events in question. This difficulty is, of course, due to the nature of available historical data. Comparatively few primary sources are written by members of the working class, and such working-class documentation as exists tends to come from labour leaders. Such sources tend to be written as political didactics, glorifications or justifications and, as such, must be treated with caution. Whilst often useful as background material to provide indicators of the motivations of those who have been 'called' politically, they tell us little about the orientations of rank-and-file supporters; leaders by their position as such being clearly apart from the majority in some way or another. Thus, historians confront great difficulty in trying to gain access to those factors contingent in the formation and perpetuation of beliefs.

Historians, therefore, are, of a necessity, often reduced to asserting through inference that actions undertaken by working people in the objective world were based upon a subjective commitment to class interests. Once again, we return to one of the problems outlined in relation to Marxist theory; that is, that historical research tends, though the nature of its data, to advance simplistic accounts of the relationship between objective



and subjective conditions for existence. It is hard for historians to establish fully the content and aims of workers' thoughts, and the relationship between these and the material world.

This also relates to the second criticism levelled at Marxist theory, for the inadequacies within the data which produce this weakness mean, further, that it is difficult for historians to uncover the mechanisms underlying consciousness and how these are affected by change over time. Thus, for example, in relation to the work of Foster, whilst he presents us with three periods characterised by different forms of consciousness, the simplistic nature of the compartmentalisation does not fully explain the nuances of the changes, how they were affected, and the relation between them. As Musson argues, it is unlikely that each period was so clear-cut, and probable that each type of sentiment could be found outwith its own period[8]. Nor do we see how previous periods affected future developments, or whether demands and beliefs were in any way shaped by past experience. By separating events in the flow of time, and thus forms of thought and action, it becomes hard to establish how actors fit current circumstances into their pasts, and how they perceive the past to affect their futures. As such, one of the problems of dealing with historical data further relates to the difficulty of grasping the roles of past experience and future expectations, and how they may be involved in a complex interplay with present concerns which then act out into the future.

The problems for historians are thus two-fold. Firstly, that historians may make unsubstantiated claims about the relationship between objective and subjective factors, according to self-made definitions about what is to count as valid expressions of class interests and, secondly, that it is hard to give an adequate explanation of the role of history in historical accounts. The alternative is equally discouraging; namely, that they eschew any claims to rigorous analyses and confine themselves to simplistic descriptions of particular periods and events.



This criticism is by no means seeking to under-estimate the valuable work undertaken by labour historians, but merely wishes to focus attention on the role of the historian should explanatory theoretical accounts of the relationship between subjective and objective phenomena prove elusive. The insights provided by research into class action are both enlightening in their own right, as accounts of key periods, activities and institutions in the past, and by the means they give to sharpen theoretical perspectives. Studies on labour movements and trade-unions in the past are a crucial form of descriptive labour history[9]. Yet such accounts are often simplistic. Unable to uncover the active processes underlying beliefs of ordinary workers, they are reduced to portraying the activities of 'master statuses'; the movement of broad monolithic groups in time and space, acting in concert, with little sense of the complexity of thought found between and, indeed, within individual participants. As Bulmer argues, for example:-

This is not to ignore the formidable body of historical material about the growth of trade unionism in Britain. However, even if this provides data on the growth of organised class consciousness, it is predominantly the history of union organisation and the union leadership. There is relatively little data on the class-consciousness or class imagery of the rank-and-file union member. If the main characteristic of the discussion of the nature of imagery is disagreement or contradiction, that of the historical dimension is emptiness, in the sense of how little there is to go on in discussing this field. There is therefore very great scope for sociologically informed historical research into class imagery, perhaps by way of the history of particular occupations or particular localities. It is, however, fraught with methodological difficulties, both in the collection and analysis of data, and the rigours and difficulties facing the historical sociologist of imagery should not be underestimated[10].

Despite Bulmer's warnings of the difficulty of the task, however, given the problems involved in the analysis of subjective phenomenon in history, unless one adheres to a strict Marxist view which accepts the simplistic conceptualisation of the relationship between thought and action, which would render the idea of



monolithic groups plausible, it is to the area of sociological analysis that one must turn in order to seek a more complex and dynamic approach to this area of debate.

#### 1.4 Consciousness and Sociology.

As a starting point in the analysis of trends within British sociology which have attempted to understand the complexity of the relationship between class consciousness and action, the debates focusing around the ideal typology laid down by Lockwood provide a useful point of departure[11]. This work did not seek to deal with 'class consciousness' in any overtly political way, but sought to relate social imagery to types of occupational community; that is, the analysis attempted to deal with the experiential consequences for perception without being concerned with the somewhat laden assumptions of Marxist conceptualisations. Lockwood formulated three ideal types - the proletarian traditional worker, the deferential traditional worker and the privatised worker - each of which developed certain types of social imagery dependent upon their particular industrial and communal milieux.

It is the proletarian traditionalist who equates most closely with the concerns of this study. Lockwood identifies such workers as found in the traditional industries such as coal mining, docking and shipbuilding, whose workers tend to live in solidaristic, isolated communities. He argues that such workers have a high degree of work involvement, pride in work, relative autonomy from authority and strong attachments to fellow workers. The shared experience of work carries over into collectivistic cultural values expressed within close-knit, mutualistic communities. It is due to the experiences in work and community that, Lockwood argues, such workers have the most oppositional imagery of the three types. He states:-

Shaped by occupational solidarities and communal sociability the proletarian social consciousness is centred on an awareness of 'us' in contradistinction to 'them' who are not part of 'us'. 'Them' are bosses, managers, white-collar



workers and, ultimately, the public authorities of the larger society. Yet even though these outsiders are remote from the community, their power to influence it is well understood, and those within the community are more conscious of this power because it comes from the outside. Hence the dominant model of society held by the proletarian traditionalist is most likely to be a dichotomous or two-valued power model. Thinking in terms of two classes standing in a relationship of opposition is a natural consequence of being a member of a closely integrated industrial community with well defined boundaries and a distinctive style of life.... it is probable that this image of society is fully developed only among those workers whose sense of the industrial hiatus is strengthened by their awareness of forming a quite separate community. Moreover,... it would seem that the tendency to adopt a power model of society is most evident among workers who have a high degree of job involvement and strong ties with their fellow workers. In other kinds of work situations, where these factors are absent, or nearly so, the whole significance of the workplace as a determinant of a dichotomous class ideology is correspondingly reduced[12].

Such an argument would, in many ways, accord with elements of the Marxist position outlined earlier. Lockwood directly relates the collectivistic and conflictual imagery of the proletarian traditionalist to his objective conditions of existence, yet is attempting to locate subjectivity not solely within the industrial sphere but seeks to demonstrate how this may be informed by the totality of working-class actuality. However, the social imagery derived from the objective world does not, as would appear in the Marxist analysis, become automatically reflected in political beliefs. As Bulmer points out there is no simplistic correlation between imagery and class consciousness, and one cannot collapse one onto the other:-

By its very nature, the study of social imagery focuses upon the unorganised and often diffuse representations of social structure held by members of particular occupational groups. The relationship between unorganised images and organised consciousness is complex and ramified, and the one should not be assimilated to the other.... In short, the relationship between social imagery and class consciousness is problematic. Although the existence of certain images of society may be regarded as underlying collective class action, there is no automatic connection between men's views of the stratification system and of the social hierarchy, and the consequences of those views for voting behaviour, strike action, or other manifestations of collective solidarity of a class-based kind[13].



These arguments indicate the awareness that there is a greater complexity in the relationship between subjective and objective factors than many Marxist analyses would allow, for the different factors interact, [work values affecting communal values through actors], without necessarily being tied to specifically political goals. Further, Bulmer argues that the response to actuality, even for group members, will by no means be uniform:-

One would expect there to be a good deal of actual variation in social imagery, even in a single-industry community with a geographically isolated immobile population. In part, too, the conceptual specification of an actor's 'orientation' to work, to community, to society, to class, implies a consistency which is an abstraction from the diversity which is found in practice. In relating images to social structure, the most immediately realisable aim is to show congruences between particular social characteristics and particular types of imagery, rather than demonstrate necessary causal relationships between the one and the other[14].

Yet whilst Lockwood's typology, and Bulmer's response to this offer positive insights into the complex relationship between the material world and subjective perception there are two areas of difficulty for the study of beliefs. Firstly, whilst Lockwood presents us with the different types of working-class environment and imagery, his account is ultimately hypothetical and descriptive, for he fails to offer evidence of how the two levels interact, nor provides guidelines for how research to demonstrate his ideas might be carried out. Thus, in the end, the typology fails actively to engage in the fluidity of the relationship. Crucially related to this is Lockwood's utilisation of the 'ideal type', a methodological tool which is both static and simplistic. By their nature ideal types are, as Bulmer states, 'snapshots'; moments frozen in time. This, once again, brings us back to the problem of how theoretical orientations may lead to a lack of dynamism within accounts of consciousness and the failure to account for temporal reflexivity, or provide an explanation of possible change.



Bulmer, however, whilst agreeing that ideal types are ahistorical, argues that they should not be evaluated for their veracity or falsity but for their usefulness as models against which to measure evidence and with which, it is expected, they will disagree:-

Far from being pre-existing categories or boxes into which data is to be fitted, ideal types are constructs to be compared with the empirical data, in the expectation that significant differences will be apparant. Nor are ideal types intended to provide a specification of the whole range of theoretical alternatives available.... Again, their purpose is to act as reference points for theoretical analysis, from which it starts out but from which it is expected to diverge[15].

Yet if ideal types are, by their nature, simplistic and static, then their value in enhancing understandings of what is, again by its very nature, complex and dynamic, is negligible. Thus, Lockwood's conclusions, whilst providing useful indications of the direction for analyses, fail to enlighten one fully about the interactive mechanisms between objective and subjective conditions for action. Further, it is perhaps due to the inadequacies of Lockwood's methodology that another crucial issue fails to be resolved; that is, the exact nature of the relationship between imagery and class consciousness, which Bulmer would appear to argue are discrete phenomena.

As has already been stated, Lockwood's use of the concept of social imagery is a positive one, for it emphasises that there is not, as Marxist theory would have us assume, a simple correlation between the material world and a necessarily politically-oriented class consciousness. However, Lockwood does argue that the proletarian traditionalist is part of "the most radical and class conscious segment of the working class"[16]. However, this assertion, perhaps due to the nature of the typology, is assumed, or described, rather than proven, and it is unclear whether the substance of the two forms of subjective experience are one and the same, or whether some extra ingredient is necessary to transform imagery into class consciousness. Bulmer argues, in



accordance with Lockwood, that there is a difference between the two; conflict being inherent to class consciousness, which requires to be expressed in an organisational context, whereas social imagery, as we have seen, he regards as an unorganised and diffuse phenomenon[17]. Yet they fail adequately to account for

the relationship between the two. Thus, there is a lack of clarity within the hypothesis which is not overcome. Indeed, there is a sense in which, in the end, it would seem that Lockwood has merely inserted the concept of social imagery as a wedge between actuality and consciousness, without fully explaining their connections. Consequently, whilst accepting that there may be a difference between the two, one is left with the need to uncover the exact nature of this relationship, and the mechanisms by which one may be translated into the other.

Westergaard also expresses a certain disquiet about this issue, and argues that Lockwood's distinction between social imagery and class consciousness is unnecessary. Whilst accepting that the latter is more explicitly political, he believes that Lockwood under-estimates the degree to which this political element may also be found within social imagery. He argues:-

To my mind the distinction between [class imagery and class consciousness] is spurious. It is a distinction, of course, that [Lockwood] related to the presence or absence of explicit political elements in 'stratification consciousness'. But it seems spurious, above all, because any kind of class imagery has political connotations. Class imagery involves an image of society; or a series of perhaps contradictory, conflicting, rather confused and ambivalent pictures of what society is like and where the individual fits into it. However confused, however contradictory, there are inevitable political elements, whether they are explicit or not[18].

Thus Westergaard would argue that there is a closer degree of similarity between class imagery and class consciousness than Lockwood would have us believe and that it may be that this hinges on the extent to which political sentiments are implicitly or explicitly formulated or not. We will return to such an idea below in relation to the work of Popitz et al. For the moment, there would appear to be the possibility, from Westergaard's



statement, that it may be the case that the imagery derived from the proletarian traditionalist's world, by the implicit class orientation of its perceptions, acts to lay the foundations upon which may be erected explicitly-formulated political ideologies which would systematise such orientations into a coherent world view. Both the issues discussed above, of the complexity of the relationship between the objective and the subjective, and the relationship between social imagery and political consciousness, have preoccupied later writers.

Other writers have sought to highlight the complexities of social imagery by drawing attention to the fragmented nature of perception. Mann, for example, argues that analyses which seek to explain the lack of class consciousness through the concept of a dominant ideology are not adequate but that, rather, one must look at the pragmatic nature of working class acceptance of society[19]. He argues that the picture is somewhat more complex than the mere adoption, or not, of class perceptions and that the working class display both dominant and deviant values simultaneously. These operate in different areas of life; with the former being found in relation to abstract values and the latter in the areas of the concrete and commonplace experiences of everyday life. As such, the presence of these conflicting values means that the working class may be seen as developing different perceptions in relation to different spheres of the material world; rather than drawing upon one 'fixed' world view.

Davis seeks to argue that the fragmented nature of social images is due to the complex nature of society, which acts to undermine collectivistic awareness[20]. This is, in some ways, supported by Brown and Brannen, who use their empirical data to argue specifically against Lockwood. Looking at shipbuilders, whom the latter would characterise as traditional proletarians, they argue that there are sub-groups even within the occupational community, caused by industrial demarcations, whilst larger social ideas permeate the communities, promoting new beliefs[21].



Such arguments would, therefore, argue against a coherent social imagery, or form of consciousness; even among workers who form what Lockwood regards as a radical section of the working class. These works would appear to support the argument that simplistic typifications must be firmly rejected. However, whilst welcoming the contribution to debates on the complexity of subjectivity, these works again refer us back to a previous problem in that they are essentially lacking a grounding in historical analysis which might help elucidate their arguments.

Thus, in relation to Davis' work, one cannot fully accept a decline in collectivism without a greater analysis of what this previous condition actually entailed in order to determine the similarities and divergences. With Brown and Brannen, one should like more detail on whether the experience of the shipbuilders in 1970 was similar to that of previous generations, and what consequences these may have had for different age-groups. In relation to the other problem mentioned earlier, the issue of the fragmented nature of imagery and its potential relationship to the political coherence of radical consciousness has also been explored by other writers.

The work of Popitz et al is illuminating in that they identify and describe six different types of social imagery to be found among workers. Although five of these expressed some form of dissatisfaction with the prevailing system only two types - those who saw a mission for the labour movement and those with a conceptualisation of class conflict - contained overtly politicised attitudes; albeit to different degrees[22]. Their conclusions about social imagery appear ultimately to rest on the extent to which workers are able to place ideas about the social world within a larger framework of analysis. Their arguments would largely accord with those of Westergaard, therefore, in that social imagery is seen as either implicitly or explicitly political. Social imagery, they argue, goes beyond the realm of explaining the immediate surroundings of the individual and



depends upon whether:-

... a respondent can actually formulate his ideas and ... be able to marshall the relevant facts in accordance with his views on any particular question. However, there is a group of respondents for whom this assumption ceases to hold good as soon as the questions go beyond the realm of their individual experience[23].

This analysis is fruitful in that places perception within the ability to articulate political understandings about the nature of social arrangements, and highlights the different levels of this ability to be found among the working class. Yet whilst the nuances of perception are carefully described, we do not learn the factors which induce the various understandings. Thus, although we may accept that social imagery and political consciousness may merely reflect different levels of political coherence, we do not gain an understanding of why, and how, this should be so.

The work of Parkin, which attempts to provide a more rigorous theoretical framework to the subject matter, is worthy of comment in this connection, for he attempts to analyse how actors come to adopt political understandings[24]. He argues that the form of consciousness found among actors is crucially dependent upon their access to 'meaning systems'; that is, to interpretative systems which make sense of the world. He identifies three types of meaning systems which operate at the macro-level of society rather than the micro-level of community and workplace.

His use of the concept of the 'dominant value system' relates to the Marxist idea that it is the dominant social groups who manage to ensure that their particular value and system is propagated within society, this acting to legitimate existing social arrangements and inequalities. Such ideas, spread through-out society, act onto the working class, inhibiting class consciousness and instilling deferential or aspirational consciousness.



The second type of meaning system he calls the 'subordinate value system', which, he argues, does not act to make workers endorse existing social relations but, rather, engenders 'modes of adaption' which act to accommodate actors into society. Thus, though workers do not accept these social relations, they do not adopt an oppositional stance to them but merely attempt to adapt themselves to living as best as possible within current arrangements. Parkin would associate trade-union activities into this mode, in the sense that they attempt to win advances within the system rather than through seeking to change this to their advantage.

It is, therefore, only through access to the third meaning system that radical consciousness is generated, which he calls the 'radical value system'. This is characterised by a dichotomous and conflictual view of society, and an oppositional consciousness which seeks to change existing arrangements. Such a stance comes from access to the philosophies of a radical socialist party. As such, Parkin's analysis may be seen to contain aspects of a Leninist argument, in the sense of the need for a revolutionary party to systematise the inchoate thoughts of the working class.

Again, other writers would support Parkin's arguments for the need for an explicitly socialising agent for the generation of radical class consciousness, and provide us with analyses of how this may come about. Gallie, for example, relates the radicalism of French workers to a combination of work grievances and managerial authority, and exposure to left-wing politics[25]. His work would thus explain French opposition to class inequalities in terms of experiences within industry. Such a view would be supported by Lash's work, which also relates militancy to the availability of trade unions and political parties whose philosophies act to inform workers' beliefs[26].

These writers, therefore, would argue for a greater complexity in understanding class consciousness through their analyses of the relationship between perceptions and an explicitly politicised



world view. Yet, with both writers, there is perhaps an overly-strong centrality given to the dominance of the workplace in the development of consciousness, and we are not given access to the place of non-work in this, nor are we given an explanation which shows how patterns change, or not, over time. Consequently, there is little explanation of how actors operate within the totality of their life experience. We thus require, as shall be seen in later chapters, to draw together the social, industrial and political to formulate a broader understanding.

This brief exploration of some of the key orientations within the field provides us with a few useful indicators of both fruitful areas of examination and major weaknesses. It has shown us some crucial insights into the complexity of the relationship between objective and subjective conditions, which those like Parkin and Gallie have attempted to take further by arguing that this requires a deliberately political input to transform it into a coherent radical consciousness. Yet though each makes a valid addition to the overall scenario, one is left without a firm understanding of the mechanisms operating between the two areas of being, and how a radical consciousness ties into the base of working-class life. Lockwood, himself, draws attention to this fact:-

However the problem remains... of specifying the conditions under which adhesion to a 'radical meaning system' is likely to become at all widespread among the working class. And this problem resolves itself first and foremost into the question: under what conditions does socialist ideology articulate with workers' images of society? For the emergence of a radical class consciousness has its precondition in the affinity between the theoretical consciousness of socialist soteriology and the practical consciousness of working class life. The problematic nature of the relationship between these two levels of consciousness must be the starting point of any analysis of working class consciousness[27].

Thus, despite explanations which argue that there is a greater complexity between the experiential and political than was previously acknowledged the nature of this relationship requires detailed clarification. The arguments offered above appear to



indicate that the basis for political affinity does not lie in external relation to everyday actuality but is crucially related to lived experience, but that the transition to politicisation depends upon explicit socialisation. Consequently, this interplay needs to be unravelled. Further, one must establish the extent to which radical beliefs can be held to provide a coherent world view which allows adherents to engage in systematised critique of social arrangements, or whether, as some would argue, these are ambiguous and incomplete.

In addition to this, studies fail to locate both levels of experience within time. It is believed that by placing analyses within the historical context of the actors involved one may perceive more readily the bases upon which adherence to radical consciousness are formed and shaped in changing historical periods. To return to the original outline as provided by Marx, however, one can see that within this formulation there was the provision for the greater complexity and dynamism that is required, in the sense that the historical dialectic can be conceived as the fluid interaction of objective and subjective forces over time, with both knowledgeable and capable actors attempting to take conscious control over their destinies.

This theoretical potential needs to be recaptured by understanding how actors place themselves both within their own objective world and within the flow of time, and use the knowledge and experience this gives to engage in a social critique. Crucial to this relation of past and present, however, is the sense of the future; that is, an alternative philosophy which provides the 'blueprint' for a different form of social arrangement. Thus, radical consciousness requires vision. As Westergaard states, as a criticism of Lockwood's typology which, he argues, fails to accommodate this:-

A radical class consciousness involves identification with, a recognition of common interests with, workers in other situations, outside the immediate locality, outside the particular conditions of an occupational community.... It involves at least a tentative vision on an 'alternative



society'. It certainly involves opposition. The vision of an alternative society may be an implicit one; but historically it has been more than that. Some vision of this kind has been carried within all the Social Democratic movements, as well as in the Communist movements of Western capitalist society: a vision, however inchoate, of a society different in character and quality from capitalism[28].

Thus, any framework utilised to aid the explanation of such issues must be capable of aiding a dynamic and complex understanding of radical consciousness, and which allows for a conceptualisation of actors who are capable of conscious negotiations with the material world which they inhabit. Giddens' exposition of structuration theory may be useful in such an undertaking[29]. Whilst his work is extensive on a whole range of issues and, therefore, beyond the scope and requirements of the debate under discussion, there are several concepts within his formulations which can fruitfully be incorporated within an analysis of the mechanisms operating in the relationship between objective and subjective conditions over time. His conceptualisation of structuration, by viewing social reality as both structured yet inhabited by purposive actors capable of penetrating social arrangements and effecting social change, may facilitate the explanation of the interaction between the material world, beliefs, identity and radical consciousness, and contains the potentiality for uncovering the complexity of beliefs.

Firstly, the conceptualisation of social structures as structural properties instantiated at the point of action, and containing the rules and resources used in action, allows one to account for the social reproduction of consciousness and action over time. It provides the framework for a theorisation wherein custom is perceived as structure. One can thus see how traditional practices and historical knowledge of social groups are drawn upon in action to provide sense of the contemporary actuality, and precedents for action, thus acting as the means to sustain such rules and resources over time. As shall be seen in Chapter Three, it is believed that actors use their historical memory to provide identification, beliefs, legitimation and guidelines for action.



Thus, in Giddens' theorisation, social action is seen as essentially recursive.

Yet secondly, and in accordance with the interpretative elements within Marxist theory, Giddens does not view the relations of production as being necessarily superior to actors, nor as fully determining their actions, but as a product of human activity and, therefore, historically variable. Thus, like Marx, Giddens believes social relations both shape human action and are changed by them. Structuration theory, therefore, views structural properties as both a vehicle for creative action as well as a means of social constraint. As such, it enables one to offer explanations wherein actors have different degrees of choice within constraint, and to account for the dynamic interaction between subject and object in changing historical periods. Thus, whilst action is recursive, the fluidity of Giddens' model allows for a dynamic approach to analyses for he argues that change and innovation are inevitable over time, as spatio-temporal circumstances are changed by human action, which allows one to avoid the ahistorical, and often fixed nature of explanations.

Thirdly, and relatedly, by placing actors within a past/present/future configuration present at the point of action Giddens allows us to explain how action, whilst drawing on the past, is crucially affected by future expectations, thus avoiding the simplistic viewpoint wherein action appears to relate only to immediate circumstances. If the first two points relate to the complexity of changing conditions, objective and subjective, over time, the last concept refers more directly to the complexity of human thought and potentialities.

Giddens believes that actors are essentially knowledgeable and capable in relation to the world they inhabit. Individuals are seen as able to grasp and reflect on material circumstances and make decisions, based on past/present/future considerations, within constraint. Thus, actors do not respond merely to objective stimuli, but engage actively with these. As such, both



routinised and innovative action can be seen as voluntary, pragmatic or whatever, as well as determined.

Related to this is the perception of power within his concept of the 'dialectic of control', for by arguing that all actors have both knowledgeability and power one can escape the tendency to see actors as passively responding to circumstances. Power is viewed as contained within the fluidity of social action, and is a resource social groups may have to different degrees in changing periods, and whereby they attain and lose relative levels of autonomy in changing historical circumstances. Such a concept may thereby facilitate our understandings of the fluctuating fortunes of groups over time.

Giddens, therefore, offers a framework within which one may advance explanations which may grasp the fluidity and complexity of the conditions of existence, and which appreciates how structural arrangements can be both enabling and constraining. We can thus avoid both the excessive determinism and voluntarism of previous accounts. For studies on the mechanisms underlying social consciousness, the focus that may be put upon his work is to perceive thought as the mediator between structural properties and social action; that is, as that point at which structural properties are either reproduced or transformed by action. Yet one of the most positive elements of the framework is that, by situating actors within a dynamic world with varying levels of power, one may explore the factors acting to enable or inhibit forms of consciousness, and the fragility of beliefs in a changing world. Giddens thus offers us both complexity and dynamism of understanding. What requires resolution is the means by which to operationalise such a framework.

### 1.5 Putting Theory into Practice.

The problems involved in the operationalisation of concepts of imagery and consciousness would appear, given the above discussion, to be by no means inconsiderable. Put simply, the



difficulties are those of defining what exactly one is seeking to uncover, and discovering the best field in which to accomplish this; that is, what sample may best illustrate the issues at hand.

As we have discovered, the two central issues appear to be the relationship between objective and subjective conditions for consciousness and action, and the relationship between social imagery and class consciousness. One of the first prerequisites is to define the way in which this latter term is to be understood. It has been argued that largely due to the original Marxist theorisation, this has become a somewhat politically-laden term, pregnant with assumptions about the inevitable role of the working class, which consequently serves to undervalue broader forms of socio-political opposition. To try and avoid such complicated territory, therefore, the term to be employed is that of 'radical consciousness' which, following Tilly, is perceived broadly as taking the form of contention with prevalent political ideologies and forms of social organisation[30].

This distinction made, the desire is to analyse how social beliefs and identity are located within lived experience, and to examine the relationship between informal, [or implicit], and formal, [or explicit] political beliefs; that is, how social beliefs may underlie a coherent political standpoint. Of central interest is how those who come to radical consciousness do so, but further, the study seeks to establish how this is sustained and reproduced over time, both within and across generational groups. Consequently, it is necessary to identify a 'radical' group suitable for analysis.

Given the earlier discussion focusing around the work of Lockwood, a potential target sample would be adequately met by a group falling within the category of 'proletarian traditionalists'. Perhaps, *par excellence*, the group of proletarian traditionalists whose radicalism is most readily taken for granted within the academic literature are the miners[31]. Fulfilling all the prerequisites of Lockwood's ideal typology, and surrounded by a



literature attesting to both historical and contemporary radicalism, they thus provide an acceptable group for study. Bulmer also has further provided an ideal typology specifically of mining communities, and detailed their characteristics, these being: physical isolation; the dangerous and insecure nature of employment; socio-economic homogeneity; communal, and largely work-oriented, nature of leisure activities; segregation of domestic roles; economic and political conflict, [with the miner invariably losing], and with a general overlapping of all aspects of life[32]. He makes two further points which enhance the suitability of the miners for the study; firstly, that due to the tendency of mining communities to stay in a fixed area over prolonged periods they have a shared history, and, secondly, that there are both exogenous and endogenous possibilities for change. Thus, the miners may be capable of highlighting the ways in which radical consciousness is perpetuated over time and the role of history within this. A further, rather negative, factor is that the declining fortunes of the British coal industry means they also provide the possibility of analysing how changes are affected and experienced both in relation to industrial and cultural change.

The use of the miners is made more attractive by the fact that whilst their radicalism forms an almost implicit assumption for many writers, the analysis of this has tended to concentrate, as epitomising Bulmer's earlier argument, on features of the mining community or miners' union at particular historical junctures[33]. Comparatively little work has been carried out on the mechanisms by which the miners have achieved and sustained this over a chequered history. At the same time, it allows us to examine the veracity of the portrayal of the miners' as the archetypal militants and of the correctness or not of the ideal typology.

#### 1.6 Conclusion.

This chapter has sought to draw out key areas of debate within the analysis of radical consciousness and indicate certain points of



weakness. It has been argued that much work within the area has adopted limited methodological tools and approaches which have failed fully to explicate how actors' beliefs are related to the totality of their lived experiences and how these are transformed into systematised political philosophies. It has been suggested that social imagery, derived from everyday life, contains the implicit political assumptions which may be coalesced into coherent political beliefs by a distinct socialising agent, and that analysis should attempt to unravel the mechanisms through which this is accomplished. But, further, attention has been paid to the need to comprehend the complexity and fragility of such stances in an ever changing world, and the necessity, therefore, of placing research within a historical context that can attempt to unravel this. It has been argued that structuration theory may provide a loose framework within which such a task may be facilitated, and that the miners provide a group who appear to be able to aid such a project by their apparant radicalism. Having so concluded, one must next locate an area within which this may be operationalised, and one which fulfils the prerequisite of the ability to maintain radical consciousness over time; that is, the miners must be located within space and time.

## CHAPTER TWO.

## A RADICAL REGION: THE FIFE MINERS.

2.1 Introduction.

In the previous chapter we dealt with some of the key trends in the literature on what has been termed radical consciousness. These explanations all dealt with the orientations of individuals resultant upon their identity within social groups - whether as part of a class or occupation - and sought to identify the means by which actors come to their beliefs as a consequence of their membership of such collectivities. Yet if occupational or social position engenders certain beliefs and attitudes due to actors' particular positions in the objective world, so too may geographical location influence subjective understandings, for different areas are characterised by different material factors. As such, in addition to such definitions, we must also place our sample within a spatial setting, in order to determine how locality effects consciousness; for actors live their lives within the confines of local areas which may differently effect experience, identity and consciousness.

This orientation is backed by work from sociologists, historians and geographers, who have all highlighted the uneven nature of capitalist industrial development in Britain. The necessity of locating industries in areas with the required resources, whether in terms of power, mineral wealth, transportation or labour, and the ways these interact with pre-existing markets, forms of land or capital ownership and social relations has been long acknowledged to play a vital role in the particular regional formation of capitalism, and its attendant social relations. The particular nature of the social structures which emerge from the interplay of spatio-temporally located factors may thereby have crucial effects on the formation of subjective understandings to which actors come through their experience of these. As Giddens



argues:-

In class society, spatial division is a major feature of class differentiation. In a fairly crude, but nevertheless sociologically significant, sense, classes tend to be regionally concentrated. One can easily instance the contrasts between the north and south of England, or west and east Scotland, to make the point. Such spatial differentiations always have to be regarded as time-space formations in terms of social theory. Thus one of the important features of the spatial differentiation of class is the sedimentation of divergent regional 'class cultures' over time...[1].

It is in this context that we may use the concept of a 'radical region'. It attempts to draw attention to, and enlighten, understandings of how the uneven development of capitalist production has consequences for actors' attitudes and actions. It emphasises how the variation in spatio-temporal industrial development crucially affects social structural arrangements and the reactions these elicit in response to lived class experience. Thus, rather than claim a uniformity of class consciousness and action based on an exposure to capitalist social relations, *per se*, it seeks to unravel the complexity of spatio-temporally located factors. This located nature of the class structure will affect the degree to which regions may manifest radical characteristics. Williams, for example, argues that the attachment to socialism and unionism, themselves in many ways manifestations of a 'universal' sentiment resulting from people's experiences as workers, is mediated through other social relationships which actors experience within their lives. He argues:-

We can understand this better, as a historical process, if we begin by recognising that an organised labour movement, even before the process of its association with socialism, has to insert itself in societies which are already strongly bonded in other ways. I mean by **bonding** the institution and exercise of those relationships which are capable of maintaining the effective practice of social life as a whole. In the simplest societies there are basic bonds of kin and of locality, and these are not cancelled, though their forms may greatly change, in more complex societies[2].



An examination of a region can thus reveal how class relations are dependent upon existing social arrangements. Cooke notes five factors important in such an elucidation; the productive base of the area, the form of labour process, capital ownership, the specific nature of social relations and whether there are oppositional institutions capable of sustaining radical consciousness. The relative strength and means of interaction between the factors affect the degree to which the region can be deemed radical. Yet, whilst Cooke argues that the three regions he examines manifest these qualities, it is this last factor which appears to be the crucial determinant of a radical region. He argues:-

The extent to which particular regional formations generate oppositional institutions is a measure of the extent to which the key mechanism of class antagonism between capital and labour has structured the everyday working and consuming lives of the majority population. Such institutions are expressions of the relative independence of labour from the cultural pressures of class-collaboration or subordination to privatistic norms. They are likely to take the form, certainly, of strongly organised and supported trades unions, a range of left-wing political parties and left-wing local government, and, possibly, systems of popularly-controlled meeting places, health, educational and leisure facilities[3].

The emphasis that Cooke gives to the role of political and industrial institutions as a result of his regionally-based analysis, therefore, corresponds with the general theoretical arguments outlined in Chapter One. Further support comes from another spatially-fixed study by Cornish, who relates the quiescence of the Cleveland ironstone miners to the absence of such institutions within both the work and social lives of the workers; this being compounded by the communal predominance of a resident petite bourgeoisie:-

The control of factors determining the miner's attitude to political and industrial action extended beyond work into almost every facet of his social life. Institutional practices in the mining communities were dominated by the petite bourgeoisie whose ideological stance, allied to the mine-owners' world view, severely limited the opportunities for an alternative consciousness to develop. The exercise of power was directly against the interests of the miner...[4].



The concentration on a given locality may thus facilitate a more comprehensive analysis on the specific factors engendering particular formations of consciousness and behaviour patterns. They allow us to understand why specific types of belief and action occur where they do. Such studies, however, have been subject to the criticism that the decline of old industries, international capitalism and state intervention have reduced the significance of regions and replaced them with a new emphasis on local industrial and employment factors[5]. Yet the ways in which such factors are experienced will crucially depend upon the existing spatial circumstances underlying the form of class relations and consciousness. Thus, whilst structural changes do radically alter regional developments, it is the previous nature of social arrangements that will affect the ways in which changes are fitted into the region at industrial, political and cultural levels. As Cooke argues, such criticisms:-

... overlook the degree to which a supra-local cultural form can outlast the economic base which may have been crucial to its formation, and indeed, the extent to which important regional practices may have little to do with production, past or contemporary, notably in such bases of collective identification as ethno-regionalism[6].

Consequently, whilst accepting that structural change will act to alter spatio-temporally located circumstances, regional analysis allows us to comprehend the ways in which this is mediated through already existing forms of social, industrial and political arrangements and comes to reflect a compromise between the two. As such, any complex study must attempt to locate the radical group not only within its space, but within the flow of time, as we shall see in the next chapter. However, in order to develop and explore the ideas already outlined it is necessary to locate a conducive spatial setting.

We have already identified the miners as forming a radical group of workers. Characterised, for example, in a general sense as 'traditional proletarians' by Lockwood [1975], and examined



specifically by Cooke [1984], who identifies the South Wales mining community as forming a radical region, the surrounding literature attests to the militant industrial stances adopted by the miners. Further, their place in British labour movement history as those workers who played such a crucial industrial role in 1926, 1974 and 1984-85 illustrates that they have perpetuated this over time. Yet one must isolate a region within the greater coalfield.

Work such as that of Cooke or Francis and Smith [1980] in South Wales, or MacDougall [1981] and MacIntyre [1980] in Scotland, all deal with radical regions outwith the English coalfield - indeed Cooke has contrasted South Wales with the lesser radicalism of the Great Northern coalfield - which would appear to indicate that a suitable target area may be found in the geographically peripheral coalfields. MacIntyre's analysis of inter-war militancy is of particular interest in this regard. He isolates three areas characterised by the presence of radical institutions seen in relation to intense communist activity; the Vale of Leven, Maerdy and Lumphinnans. None of these places lie in England, and the latter two are mining areas; Maerdy in South Wales and Lumphinnans in Fife, Scotland. Either of such areas would thus be suitable for an examination which seeks to elucidate the basis for articulated political world views.

Fife, however, is perhaps more notable in that it experienced radical activity to such an extent in this period that it became the focal point for the United Mineworkers of Scotland [UMS]; the only communist trade union ever to be sustained in Britain. Further, it elected a communist MP for 15 years, and has voted for communist councillors over a 60 year period. Fife, therefore, is an ideal setting in that it has produced politically-articulate, 'traditional proletarians' over time, as testified by this historical presence of an active CP and electoral support.

In the following sections, therefore, a brief history will be given of the key industrial and political trends in the Fife



coalfield in order to illustrate those developments which constitute the foundations, and inform the content, of the radical region. In this way we can identify the particular historical development of the region's productive base and radical institutions. It is through such an examination that we will be able to locate, in the following chapters, the changes in the lives, identity and consciousness of the Fife miners.

## 2.2 The Rise and Fall of the Fife Coal Industry.

Fife is a clearly delineated region lying within a peninsular in Eastern Scotland bounded on three sides by water - the North Sea, and Firths of Forth and Tay - and on its western landward side by the Ochil Hills. The difficulties this engendered in the nature of access to the county meant that, historically, the 'Kingdom of Fife' was an isolated county until the advent of rail and road connections facilitated travel from the end of the last century. Rich in farming land and mineral resources it was historically noted for its industrial and agricultural prosperity; which latter provided the major source of employment until the late nineteenth century. As nineteenth-century chroniclers noted:-

By the possession of... fossils, and by the abundant produce of corn and cattle, it is a common saying among the people of Fife, that their county could support itself better without the aid of imported goods than any other district of Scotland. Besides supplying home consumpt, it possesses a very large export trade in corn, potatoes, pigs, black cattle, lime, coal and sandstone, not to mention its manufactured goods. Every year this profitable traffic is increasing[7].

Consequently, due to geographical isolation and productive self-sufficiency, Fife developed as a well-defined regional area. In 1841 only six Scottish counties contained fewer immigrants than Fife, all of which were in the remote northern and western regions, and in 1871 only 14% of the county's population were not native born[8]. It was the development of its mineral wealth which transformed this picture.



Fife lies in the eastern basin of the Scottish coalfield. The area containing its mineral reserves runs along the southern half of the county from Clackmannanshire in the west to Lower Largo on the eastern coast, and is bounded on the north by the Ochil and Durie faults. To the south and east the coal reserves run out under the Firth of Forth to connect with the coalfields of the Lothians. Within this field of resources, the coalfield is split into three basins by the Balmule and Burntisland anticlines which correspond to west, central and eastern divisions.

Mining has been carried out for many centuries, the earliest known date being in 1153 when David the First claimed tithes for coal extraction around Dunfermline, but was small-scale until the late eighteenth century from which time production started slowly to increase. For example, whilst in 1800 production stood at c.400,000 tons p.a., by 1840 this had only slightly risen to c.500,000 tons p.a.[9]. The limited nature of its early expansion may be held due to the nature of the region's coals, for although it has good household and steam coals, Fife has none which are good for coking, which means that the county was unable to exploit the domestic iron industry market in the nineteenth century. Industrial coal markets capitalised instead on the presence of good navigational coals which, by the faulting of the strata acting to slightly burn the coals, made it suitable for such purposes. Being a peninsula also enabled coal expansion by providing access to shipping routes for exports from ports such as those at Kirkcaldy and Burntisland.

The potentiality for increased production was facilitated by the introduction of the long-wall system of extraction, the first known instance of which in the county was at Pitfirrane in 1771. The change from the stoop-and-room method to longwalling was largely achieved by 1880, though some leases specified that the former method continued to be used. Longwalling enabled greater production by facilitating the eventual use of machinery, increasing the potential amount of coal extraction and making it economical to work thinner seams, as well as making other



innovations possible; for example, a greater division of labour and better ventilation facilities. Thus, it engendered greater output and productivity[10].

However, despite a gradually increasing production into the mid-century, it is from the 1870s onwards that Fife's coal industry really begins to expand [Table 2.1]. The county's population exploded most dramatically between 1891-1911. As can be seen in Table 2.2, there was an increase of 80,387 in these decades. The importance of the growing mining industry in this trend can be seen from Table 2.3, which shows that although there were only 8,670 miners in the county in 1891 by 1911 there were 26,452. The impact of immigration to this development can be seen from the fact that by this latter date non-native residents now accounted for nearly 33% of the county's population, with 11.55% of these from the mining areas of the Lothians and Lanarkshire[11].

In response to this there was a rapid development in the settlements of Fife, especially in the central area where the expansion of the coal industry was most pronounced. Thus, for example whilst Cowdenbeath and Lochgelly had 1,148 and 1,629 inhabitants respectively in 1861, this had grown to 14,029 and 9,149 by 1911[12]. In addition to the influx of immigrants to Fife, the rising dominance of the coal mines can be seen in the changing distribution of Fife's population during the course of the nineteenth century. Wilson notes that whilst in 1755 52% of the population lived in the eastern, [and, therefore, northerly] part of the county wherein lies the richest agricultural land, by 1911 80% of the population lived in the western, coal-mining areas of Fife[13]. Thus, the nineteenth century saw a rapid, dramatic expansion in the county as coal mining came to dominate the local economy.

This industrial expansion may be largely attributed to the establishment of new, large-scale forms of capital ownership. Coal production became increasingly concentrated in the hands of a

TABLE 2.1.  
COAL MINERS IN FIFE: 1795-1931.

<u>Year.</u>	<u>Nos. Employed.</u>
1795	2,800
1851	3,200
1871	4,526
1881	5,962
1891	8,670
1901	16,102
1911	26,452
1921	28,140
1931	23,445

Sources: G. Wilson, [1983]: Census for Scotland.

TABLE 2.2  
POPULATION INCREASE IN FIFE: 1871-1931.

<u>Year.</u>	<u>Pop.</u>	<u>Intercensal</u>	
		<u>Increase or Decrease.</u>	
		<u>Actual.</u>	<u>Percentage.</u>
1871	160,735	+5,965	+3.9
1881	171,931	+11,196	+7.0
1891	187,346	+15,415	+9.0
1901	218,837	+31,491	+16.8
1911	267,733	+48,896	+22.3
1921	292,925	+25,192	+9.4
1931	276,368	-16,557	-5.7

Source: Census of Scotland, [1931], Vol. 1, p.643.



few, large employers; the Fife Coal Company [FCC], the Lochgelly Iron and Coal Company [LICC] and the Wemyss Coal Company [WCC]. The first of these was established in 1872 and gradually acquired both existing mines from small owners and sunk new ones; thus concentrating ownership of the county's productive base. By 1922, the company, operating mainly in the central area, owned 28 of Fife's 69 pits, employing some 11,652 of the county's 28,141 miners. The LICC, established as such from the Lochgelly Iron Company also in 1872, owned 6 pits employing an estimated 3,520 workers, whilst the WCC owned 9 pits employing 5,769[14]. Thus, 43 of the county's pits were owned by just three employers; the rest being distributed among twelve smaller owners.

These companies operated large productive units using modern technological developments. The FCC, for example, had some 116 coal-cutting machines in 18 of their 23 pits by 1913, whilst the LICC used machines in all of their 8 units, and the WCC had cutters in 3 of their 8 pits[15]. The greater mechanisation of these companies may, to a certain extent, be held due to the period in which they began to expand production. The Fife coalfield was developed comparatively late. Campbell, for example, notes that the Lanarkshire coalfield was already in decline at the end of the nineteenth century; that is, the period when Fife witnessed its greatest growth and when new technological developments were increasingly enabling mining to become a capital-intensive industry[16]. The pro-technology stance of Fife's coal owners can be seen to be reflected in the relative percentages of coal cut by machinery for whilst some 6.2% of coal was cut by machine in England and Wales in 1913, and 21.9% for Scotland[17], the LICC was cutting c.28% by machinery in its pits by 1914, and 100% by 1939[18].

This large-scale production clearly had related effects on the numbers employed in productive units. For example, in 1842, Blair Colliery employed some 18 workers underground, and few pits exceeded 50[19]. By 1922, Fife's largest unit, Bowhill Colliery, owned by the FCC, employed 1,613 workers above and below ground.



The largest LICC pit, the Minto, employed c.850 and the WCC's two largest pits were the Wellesley, with 1531 workers, and the Michael, with 1043 workers. This picture can be compared to that of Lanarkshire where, in 1927, the average number employed in a mine was 193 compared to 364 in Fife. Similarly, although only 5% of Lanarkshire's 201 pits employed over 800 workers in 1919, 20% of Fife's 55 pits did so[20]. We can thus see an increased socialisation of labour.

As with the rest of Britain Fife's coal industry was to suffer the depression of the 1920s and 30s. It is hard to estimate the full extent of unemployment in the county during the inter-war years, and thus the true impact of material deprivation in this period, largely due to the inadequacies in registering the unemployed. Therefore, the already considerable drop from 28,141 in 1921 to 23,445 in 1931 recorded in the Census, is less dramatic than the actual state of affairs. This is because the figure listed in 1931 for miners also includes those unemployed workers whose usual occupation was in the pits. As is noted in Table 2.3, estimations for Fife calculated from *The Colliery Yearbook* put the figure of employed miners at 17,496. This would, therefore, appear to indicate that, in addition to the drop of 4,696 in the Census, its total would appear to conceal a further 5,949 unemployed miners in the county, which would be an additional c.25% of the mining employees merely from the registered figures alone. The total unemployed may therefore be as high as 10,645, or some 37.8% of the miners as recorded in the 1921 census.

There are also problems in trying to account for how many pits stopped production during this period. Whilst figures indicate that there were some 13 pits less in operation in 1931 than in 1922, [from 69 to 56], lists of units given for the Fife coal companies in 1931 include 11 pits listed as temporarily closed, 2 pits closed permanently, and a further 5 pits which are not mentioned at all from the 1922 figures[21]. MacIntyre argues that only 27 pits in the county were producing in 1931, and that 7,543 jobs were lost between 1924-27 alone[22], and whilst this would



TABLE 2.3  
COAL MINERS: 1911-62.

<u>Year</u>	<u>GB.</u>	<u>Scotland</u>	<u>Fife</u>
1911	1,045,272	141,104	26,452
1921	1,131,587	172,364.	28,141
1931	867,864	107,330	23,445*
1938	781,700	89,940	16,937
1947	711,400	81,057	20,559
1952	715,600	84,835	22,823
1958	698,800	85,800	24,555
1962	550,900	63,800	13,049

• This includes those employed in mines and quarries.

\* This figure includes unemployed people whose usual occupations were in the mines. The Colliery Yearbook for this year puts the number at 17,496.

Sources: Census for Scotland; The Colliery Yearbook.

appear on the surface to be an over-estimate of pit closures it would accord with the large figures of potentially unemployed miners indicated above. However, the greater degree of contraction would appear to be borne out by the evidence that some 26% of potential capacity, concentrated in the larger FCC mines, was unproductive at this time, which would correlate with the higher unemployment figure provided above. Certainly, census statistics indicate that these years saw a mass migration from the county. Although the birth rate exceeded the death rate in Fife by 22,608 between 1921-31, the population dropped by 16,557, [Table 2.2]. Thus, superficially it would appear that some 40,000 left the county. Mitigating against this, however, it must be remembered that the 1921 was taken during a holiday period, yet, even so, the Census estimates that as many as 31,000 may have left Fife[23].

With the advent of nationalisation after World War Two, the county appeared poised to enter a period of renewed growth. The infant National Coal Board [NCB], designated Fife and Clackmannan as the growth area of Scotland, which would see both greater productivity of existing viable units with the implementation of new technology, and the sinking of new super-pits; notably the Rothes pit at Glenrothes[24]. Yet the region was to be subject to differential treatment in the Board's plans, with the eastern basin, which contained the largest reserves and geological conditions most suited for modern mechanised production, being the area for major investment. The central basin contained more faulting and greater fluctuations in seam quality. Its shallower southern and western areas, those with less difficulties, were already largely exploited by the advent of nationalisation, and production was concentrated in the larger, deeper collieries to the north. Consequently the central area had little appeal for the NCB, for output in the north would be offset by exhaustion in the older parts, and it was not regarded as a long-term area. The western basin, whilst also subject to faulting and exhaustion, had significant reserves around the Comrie-Valleyfield area and the



TABLE 2.4  
COAL MINES 1921-1962.

<u>Year</u>	<u>G.B.</u>	<u>Scotland</u>	<u>Fife</u>
1921	2,786	535	69
1926	2,563	519	65
1931	1,958	408	56
1936	1,758	391	49
1947	1,542	245	41
1952	1,334	216	32•
1962	1,025	110	16*

- 9 Fife pits now included in Scottish Division No.6, Alloa.
  - \* This excludes the Rothes, [suspended production] and Seafield, [new sinking].
- 

TABLE 2.5  
PRODUCTION FIGURES 1921-1962.

<u>Year</u>	<u>G.B</u>	<u>Scotland</u>	<u>Fife</u>
1921	163,251,181	22,545,124	4,926,699•
1926	126,278,521	16,753,755	3,610,449*
1931	219,458,951	29,072,361	7,095,923*
1936	228,448,356	31,987,177	8,742,445*
1947	187,001,600	22,877,400	6,511,100⊕
1952	214,146,100	23,338,300	6,616,000⊕
1958	210,057,000	19,468,300	5,795,544
1962	190,131,000	17,502,000	3,751,000

- Fife and Clackmannan.
- \* Fife, Clackmannan, Kinross and a small quantity of anthracite from Sutherland.
- ⊕ Fife and Clackmannan provisional figures, based on calculations for 52 weeks, not a calendar year.
- ⊙ Approximate annual tonnage.

Source: The Colliery Yearbooks.

coastal area around, and under, the Forth estuary. This was to be the second growth area.

The plans involved, therefore, rationalisation, with the closure of exhausted or unviable units, but this was to be offset by expanded production resulting from investment in new and more profitable units. The 1950 Plan For Coal was predicated on meeting the estimated demands for the 1950-65 period, and set out the programme to meet this. This involved both short-term and long-term plans to step up production in existing units, in certain cases prolonging their life-expectancy, and to utilise short-term drift mines whilst investing in the new, large super-pits. Yet Fife did not manage to meet the expectations placed upon it despite overall increases in productivity. Units did not meet estimated production targets, new units did not come on stream as expected, and manpower exceeded its limits. As McNeill argues:-

... the pattern set by relatively static production and rising manpower implied declining productivity. Overall, when compared with the optimistic forecast, the actual record was one of abject failure in which the inability to realise sufficient increases in production and productivity was the main causal factor. This poor performance was especially disappointing since capital investment in new and reorganised capacity, in mechanisation and modernisation of the industry exceeded the original estimates. Spatially, in the light of obvious advantages and anticipated growth, the trends in East Fife were the most disappointing[25].

The Revised Plan for Coal of 1959 therefore prepared a new, and less optimistic scenario for the Fife coalfield. The drive for greater efficiency and financial viability was set in the light of a smaller anticipated demand due to changing markets and led to the accelerated rundown of the industry and a reduction of manpower. Thus, having taken over 41 productive units in 1947, by 1967 there were only 8 units left in Fife - Frances, Lochhead, Seafield, Blairhall, Comrie, Valleyfield, Bogside and the Randolph [Table 2.6]. Additional sources of employment could be found for Fife men in the Castlehill, Longannet and Solsgirth



TABLE 2.6  
FIFE CLOSURES: 1957-71.

1957 Jenny Gray; Lumphinnans No. 1.  
1958 Earlseat.  
1959 Cameron; Wellsgreen; Benarty; Dora.  
1960 Balgonie; Cowdenbeath No. 7.  
1962 Rothes.  
1963 Aitken.  
1964 Dundonald.  
1965 Bowhill; Lindsay; Nellie; Torry.  
1966 Fordell; Mary; Kinglassie; Glencraig;  
Lumphinnans No. 11.  
1967 Minto; Wellesley; Michael.  
1968 Randolph.  
1969 Blairhall; Valleyfield.  
1971 Lochhead.

Source: J. McNeil. [1971].

mines which formed the Longannet Complex in Clackmannanshire, which came into production the following year, and in the Cowdenbeath Central Workshops [CCW]; the BC engineering workshops in Central Fife.

The Randolph was finally shut in April 1968, and in the following year West Fife lost Blairhall and Valleyfield. By 1971, Lochhead was also closed. Reduced to the Frances, Seafield, Comrie and Longannet, [in which Bogside was now included], this reduced capacity was to stay in operation for the duration of the 1970s and up until the 1984-85 dispute. Losing the Frances by fire in February 1985, and Comrie in 1986, by 1987 the only pit in Fife was Seafield in Kirkcaldy [Table 2.7]. The economic importance of the county to British Coal [BC] has, therefore, similarly become seriously undermined. Compared to the first year of nationalisation when some 6,511,100 tons were produced, in 1987 Fife produced a mere 205,815 tonnes of actual saleable coals [Table 2.8].

Thus Fife has been the centre of severely fluctuating fortunes in the shape of a sharp and rapid expansion to a similar type of decline in its material base. It is a county which was built, and sees itself as being built, upon the coal industry, and yet, by the time of fieldwork, the industry employed under 3,000 men, even if one includes Longannet, which employs mostly Fife men, plus 279 in CCW[26].

This account of the major trends has served to highlight that the Fife miners have rarely enjoyed stability in their working lives over prolonged periods, but have been subject to frequent upheavals, in the form of unemployment and transference. The problems resulting from the rapid expansion of the industry, which was accompanied by the largely unplanned and haphazard development of communal provision, has been equalled only by the problems attendant upon industrial decline in a county overly-dependent upon a single industry[27]. Consequently, one needs to discover



TABLE 2.7  
COLLIERY MANPOWER STATISTICS: 1979-87.  
[5 week period ending March].

	79	80	81	82	83	84	86	87
Comrie	1193	1215	1171	1114	725	943	535	-
Frances	671	705	682	615	643	896	43	-
Longannet	3161	3251	3190	3113	3178	3153	2030	1889
Seafield	2179	2174	2206	1940	1855	1979	834	679*

TABLE 2.8  
COLLIERY SALEABLE ACTUAL TONNES: 1979-87.  
[5 week period ending March].

	79	80	81	82	83	84	86	87
Comrie	63693	79583	53071	37366	43198	22767	32536	-
Frances	36811	41878	32573	27845	40303	1193	-	-
Longannet	272016	190022	194598	233211	192987	66713	174867	139540
Seafield	111504	86457	96279	109546	67581	2173	20033	66275*

\* Including the Frances.

Source: NCB, Operating Colliery Results.

how the Fife miners have historically responded to the domination of their lives by an industry which has proved, even despite the hopes of nationalisation, to have denied security to those whom it employed. Yet one must first discover how Fife came to its militant stance. It is to a brief account of the major periods of historical radicalism that we now turn. But rather than concentrate upon the amount of strikes, or the nature of industrial relations, which is dealt with in a later chapter, we will seek to establish the particular nature of the Fife miners' political response in the past; that is, the nature of its radical institutions.

### 2.3 The Fife Miners: Aye Tae The Fore.

The Fife miners entered the fields of industrial organisation in 1870 when, in concert with a national campaign to establish the 8-hour day, they both secured this objective and, through their activities, became the first region in Scotland to erect a permanent union structure[28]. On 21st February in that year East Fife delegates at a meeting in Kirkcaldy unanimously agreed that an organisation should be formed[29], and this was supported by a resolution passed at a meeting a month later after exhortation to this effect by the Scottish miners' leader, Alexander MacDonald[30]. Already Lanarkshire and Ayrshire were campaigning to win the 8-hour day, and at a meeting at Crossgates on 28th April 1870 a resolution was passed that from the 1st June the Fife men would start to operate the shorter working day[31]. By mid-July, some 20 pits in Fife had adopted the 8-hour day through maintaining the tactic of downing tools and leaving the pit-bottom at the end of this time[32].

As we have already seen, the Fife coalfield was not exploited on a large scale at this time, and it was over the next forty years that the industry dramatically expanded. The period up until World War One was one of social upheaval, and Fife took part in the ferment of political discussion that was taking place in Scotland at that time[33]. Yet it was during the inter-war years



that Fife really became a centre for radical activity due to the activities of the young Communist Party [CP] and the mining communities during the depression.

The basis upon which this militant movement was to build had already been present from the pre-war agitations and their culmination in 1917 in the formation of the Fife Miners' Reform Committee, which sought to build and organise militant support among the branches[34]. But it was the post-war period which saw an increasing discontent taking place within the miners' Union in Fife between young militants and the older leaders of the Fife, Kinross and Clackmannan Miners' Association [FKCMA].

Unlike other unions which organised branches by pit, the FKCMA was set up on a geographical basis, whereby branches operated from particular communities irrespective of where residents worked. Each branch sent a delegate to the Executive Board, irrespective of membership numbers and the Secretaryship was a life-appointment. Such a bureaucratic structure was to prove a serious source of disagreement and resentment; firstly, that smaller, and often more conservative branches such as Fordell, operating under paternalistic management, had as great a voice as large branches in more militant areas such as Lumphinnans, in which area were concentrated the large productive units of the FCC and, secondly, that permanent office prevented the rise of younger men eager to win better conditions from employers and willing to take a harder stance[35].

Such a situation engendered conflict in the post-war years between younger men desperately seeking political answers to the depression in their industry and the experiences of the First World War, and older men seen as having collaborated in that war. Thus, the upheavals present in the coalfields prior to the war were to reach a greater pitch in its aftermath. As Campbell, who argues for a move from a 'bureaucratic reformist' to a 'militant miner' trade-union consciousness in the Scottish coalfield in



these years, argues:-

Although the government's acceptance of the principle of a minimum wage after the first national miners' strike of 1912 and the imposition of state control of the mines during the war can be seen as significant fulfilments of the aspirations of bureaucratic reformism, they also created strong oppositional currents within the miners' unions. In addition to the continuing transformation of the labour process through mechanisation, the union officials' bureaucratic involvement in wartime collective bargaining and recruitment procedures provided the basis for a revolutionary-led reform movement. The propaganda of Marxist educators, particularly John MacLean and his assistant James D. MacDougall were of considerable significance in shaping the ideological content of this movement[36];

For young, local militants such as John MacArthur, Davie Proudfoot and John Bird, the social problems facing the communities and the political climate of the time, in which the recent Russian Revolution played a major motivating role, drew them to the newly-established Communist Party of Great Britain [CPGB] in their attempts to provide answers to the problems facing the mining communities. Yet such motivations were enhanced by the manoeuvrings of the old-style lib-lab leaders, led by the FKCMA's secretary, Willie Adamson, who were regarded as collaborating with the coal owners.

The internal divisions between young militants and older leaders came to a head in 1923, which saw the establishment of the break-away Fife Miners' Reform Union [FMRU]. This split came in the wake of the failure of Adamson to respond to moves in the previous year to democratise the Union structure by allowing members to vote for representatives to the National Union of Scottish Mineworkers [NUSMW] Executive, rather than being merely appointed by the old-guard Fife Executive Board. Yet the immediate catalyst was the failure of the Chairman of the Board to operate the 'financial vote'; which would give branches strength according to the size of membership rather than just a one branch/one vote. In the ensuing division some 9,000 left the FKCMA to join the FMRU; including virtually all Communist Party members[37].



Reuniting in March 1927, after three years of acrimony between the unions, conflict was soon to reoccur again over election decisions. In three ballots between July 1927 and February 1928 the Fife branches voted, with over a 90% turn-out, to return five left-wing candidates to the NUSMW Executive, [four communists and one sympathiser], and two communist agents, in preference to sitting officials. The result was declared after the third ballot but challenged in November by NUSMW officials, who called for financial reports to establish which areas were in arrears. In December they decided all areas with debts should be given three months to pay up, and in August 1928 the FKCMA was expelled at Annual Conference for financial arrears in Union payments which had been built up by Adamson through overdeclaring membership during the period of battle with the FMRU.

After suspension by the Fife Executive from the secretaryship for non-fulfilment of his mandate at the NUSMW Executive in July, Adamson had set up a breakaway union in September 1928; the Fife, Clackmannan and Kinross Miners' Association [FCKMA]; a name that was, perhaps, meant to be deliberately misleading. As Adamson's FCKMA had no debts it was this union which was recognised by the NUSMW. The established FKCMA, now dominated by militants, fought unavailingly to resolve the situation with their 'Save the Union' campaign, and attempted to get approval from the Miners' Federation of Great Britain [MFGB]. This proving unsuccessful, the communist-led UMS was set up at a meeting of the Scottish Save-the-Union Council on the 13th April 1929[38].

Formed during the Communist International's 'class-against-class' policy phase, the UMS was doubtless part of this overall strategy, yet its support was most certainly linked into the immediate problems within the coalfield at that time, for it is also the case that in many ways the young militants were forced into the position that they took. Party policy, therefore, must not be seen as being unilaterally imposed upon the miners, but as corresponding to material developments in the county. In Fife, already unsettled by rapid industrial expansion with its attendant

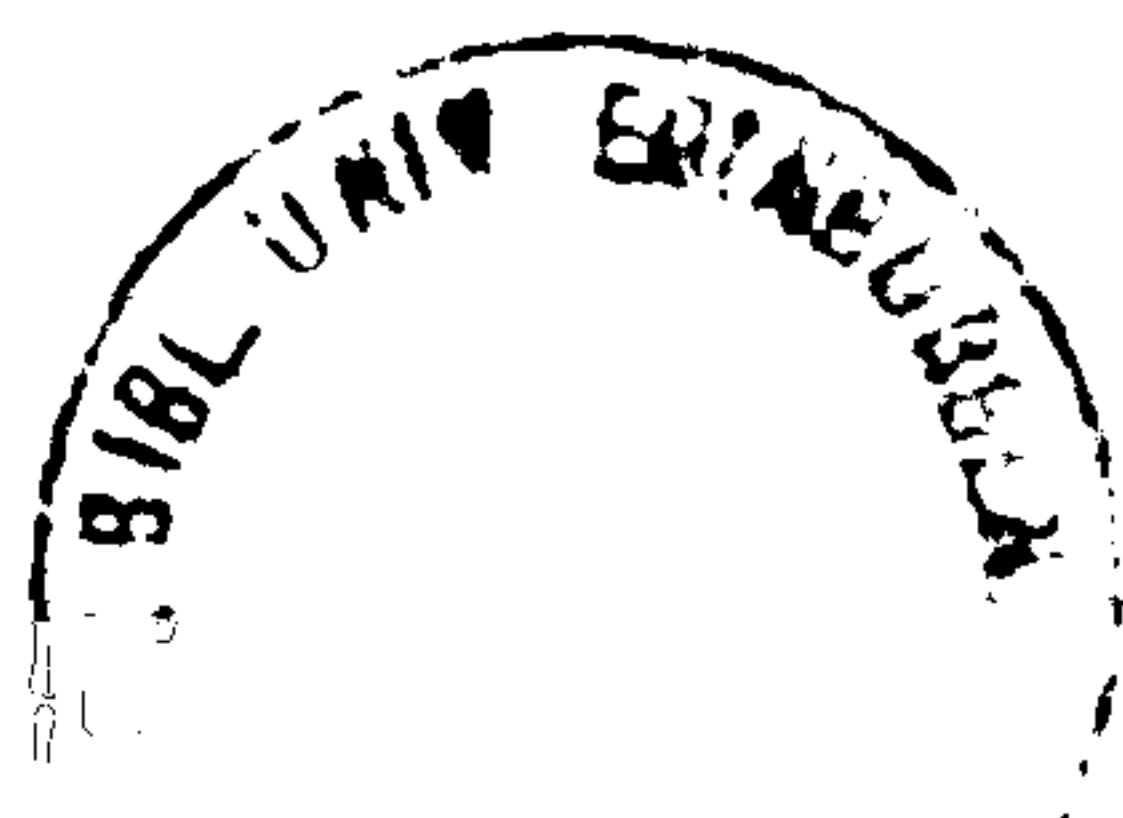


social problems, and the hardship of industrial depression, the activities of Adamson and his followers acted to fuel militants. It is, perhaps, for this reason that whilst enthusiasm for the new union soon dropped in other areas, it continued in Fife, largely due to the work of a committed group of activists, until finally dissolved in 1936.

The hard work put in by the committed few was without a doubt responsible for the continuation of the UMS after the initial surge of enthusiasm; for it was never a union of mass membership. In 1929 it claimed 14,000 members, of which 6,500 were Fifers, and by 1934 Abe Moffat, a communist miner from Lumphinnans who replaced the communist East Fifer, Davie Proudfoot as its Secretary, claimed there were 5,000. Sime believes this is grossly over-stated. Studying financial statements, he argues that figures indicate that in 1929 there were only 3,700 members, with half of these being Fifers, and by 1934 membership stood at only 1,200, of which 80% were Fifers[39].

The UMS, therefore, was numerically insignificant. Yet it was an important force in the county. It sought to establish Women's Guilds; fought strenuously for better conditions and wages for the miners; and kept up an intense political campaign through meetings, pit-papers and other activities, and strikes in the pits. The operations of Workmen's Inspectors, enabled under the terms of the 1911 Mines Act, served to portray UMS officials as having the miners' interests at heart during a period in which conditions in the pits were harsh. Sime notes, for example, that of the 29 pit inspections carried out at Fife pits in 1932, 26 of these were by the UMS[40]. However, whilst activists doubtless kept the union alive, this, in the end, must be seen to have depended upon the sympathies of the miners. Sime aptly sums-up:-

... the UMS represents an integral part of a tradition in the Fife coalfield which did not exist to the same extent anywhere else. Throughout the inter-war period the struggles of the Fife miners achieved an intensity that was generally unmatched - both in terms of the national stoppages of 1921 and 1926 and in the intra-Union disputes - a wider support for militant activity existed in the Kingdom than was generally the case.





Politically, it was reflected in greater support for the Communist Party even to the extent of their Union election in 1927 at a time when nationally they were being attacked and in decline. Industrially, Fife always presented itself as one of the most militant areas in the British coalfield, with a history of long and bitter struggles between the men and the coal companies. There were also other indications - where else could a Pioneer Corps of 6-10 year old schoolchildren organise a strike in support of a May Day holiday? No, for all its failures, the UMS is a significant part of this tradition, which, incidentally, survives to this day[41].

As this quotation indicates, the support for the CPGB and Soviet Union during the inter-war period was not to be found purely amongst Party members but also within the wider mining communities who accepted Party members as leaders. MacIntyre provides a detailed picture of the types of political and social activities which took place in Fife at this time as the Fifers engaged in mutualistic action surrounding such problems as evictions, victimisation, scab labour and the Means Test. Yet there were more explicitly political inputs to this with organisations such as the Friends of the Soviet Union, the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, the Young Pioneer Movement, Young Communist League and the ILP Sunday Schools established around the county. Supporters went on Hunger Marches and, more covertly, left the county to volunteer for the International Brigade and fight in the Spanish Civil War[42].

The strength and width of the base to radical activity in Fife, and the disenchantment with more established forms of labour organisation is perhaps most strongly indicated by the election of the CP's Willie Gallacher as MP for West Fife in 1935, defeating Willie Adamson in so doing. Gallacher, well-known as an orator and agitator in the area, retained his seat in 1945 before losing to Labour's Willie Hamilton in 1950. His election is also interesting as it was for the area of greatest Catholic density in the county. Yet, as we shall see later, the church's disapproval was insufficient to prevent communist election at both local and national level of figures popular and dominant in the mining communities.



Although agitation had declined in the coalfield from the late 1930s, with an accompanied decline in CP support with the revelation of Stalin's show trials and the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939, Abe Moffat, previously UMS Secretary, became the first president of the Scottish Miners' Union in 1942, and was replaced, on his retirement in 1961, by his brother Alec. The support for the militant leadership was to suffer some reversals in the 1950s when right-wing elements in the Union organised a counter-offensive, yet continued at branch level for leaders such as Jas Miller at the Michael, whose dynamic and forceful approach could still command respect. Thus younger miners, continued to support and recruit to the Party, often, as we shall see, in defence of those under attack. Communist leadership has remained a feature in the Fife pits into the 1980s. Thus, for example, at Fife's last pit, Seafield Colliery, until January 1987, when the men left on redundancy, of four Branch officials, three were Party members.

This pattern can be seen to be reflected in the activities of the Fife miners in the early years of nationalisation. Whilst in other areas this period was typified by a greater degree of harmony than the pre-war years, Fife continued, as we shall see in Chapter Seven, to engage in oppositional action. This pattern continued until the late 1960s from which time Fife was joined by other areas in the national resurgence of rank-and-file militancy which culminated in the two national strikes of 1972 and 1974; in which Fife was solid. Yet, overall, as shall be argued in a later chapter, there would appear to be a seeming decline in the dominance of radical politics at the local level, which has been ultimately connected to the removal of the centre of contestation from the local to the national level brought about by nationalisation, which consequently undermined the powers of local leaders to effect real change within the Fife pits.

On a political level, within the region's communities support for radical candidates remained a regular, if declining, feature of local politics until the 1980s. Communist Party members have



TABLE 2.9  
ELECTION OF COMMUNIST COUNCILLORS IN FIFE.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Council</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Name</u>
1925	Parish	E. Wemyss	John O'Neil John McArthur
		Ballingry	Abe Moffat
	County	Lumphinnans	Bruce Wallace
	Town	Lochgelly	Jimmy Stewart
1928			Alec Moffat
1933		Buckhaven	John McArthur
	County		John McArthur
1935		Valleyfield	Andrew Jarvie
		E. Wemyss	Jimmy Hope
		Bowhill	John Sutherland
	Town	Cowdenbeath	Bob Selkirk David Fairlie
[No elections during war].			
1945	County	Valleyfield	Abe Moffat
		Methilhill	Marie Stewart
		Thornton	George Sharp
	Town	Cowdenbeath	Bob Selkirk Alec Campbell Willie Sharp Joe Ferris
	County	Lumphinnans	Rab Smith
1952	Town	Cowdenbeath	Bob Selkirk
1955			Willie Sharp
1964			Alec Maxwell
1972			Tom Young Young Bob Selkirk
1973	Provost	Cowdenbeath	Willie Sharp
	Town	Lochgelly	Johnnie Neilson Jim Holmes Willie Travnor J. St. John
		Lumphinnans	Rab Smith
	County	Ballingry	Willie Clark Felix Comerford Jimmy Ritchie
	Parish		Stewart Gilmour
		Leslie	
[1974 local government reorganisation].			
1974	County	Ballingry	Willie Clark
	District	Kirkcaldy	Stewart Gilmour
1984		Dunfermline	Willie Hamilton

N.B. This table denotes gaining seat, not retaining it.

Source: Private Collection. Cowdenbeath.

continued to be returned to local office on a regular basis. Central Fife especially proved capable of sustaining a communist vote among the electorate as can be seen from Table 2.9., which is that area which fell into Gallacher's old constituency. The role of radical politics and these local leaders will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter, in a discussion of the meanings of a radical world view for its adherents.

As we have seen, the radical consciousness that has dominated the Fife communities and pits has found its major expression through the Communist Party. In relation to the arguments outlined in Chapter One, it would appear that it is the CPGB which has captured the potentiality for a radical meaning system existing within the life experiences of the miners and articulated the social imagery of these experiences into a coherent world view expressing a critique of dominant social arrangements. Further, by this historical dominance the Communist Party has been grounded within the objective history of the radical region, through the activities of its members over time.

This brief historical outline has sought to indicate key developments within the industrial and political spheres in Fife in an attempt to uncover the key factors affecting the miners' lives over time. As we saw in the first section, despite industrial decline, the former dominance of the mining industry in the county may still act out to inform subjective orientations in a period when it is no longer the key employer. What is necessary is to erect a methodological framework which will enable us to uncover how this may occur.

#### 2.4 Targetting the Sample.

The above summary has displayed the major historical trends in the lives of the Fife miners. It is these factors which we shall return to in later chapters as we witness the ways in which the miners seek to explain themselves and their collectivity. What we need to discover is how the changes noted in this chapter have



been experienced by the Fife miners, and the effects these changes have had on the formation of identity and consciousness for successive generations. That is, we seek a methodology that can elucidate how, on both experiential and perceptual levels, this changing history may have affected the identity and consciousness of different generations of miners.

By their very nature, the issues with which the research is engaged are those focusing upon the micro-level experiential and subjective aspects of the miners' lives; being concerned with the relationship between social and industrial experience and perception, and political beliefs, over time. Thus, any methodology must be competent to the task of uncovering the complexity and dynamism of such a connection for, as we have discovered, this is by no means a simplistic relationship. The mechanisms by which actors come to a radical stance, and the objective circumstances within which their beliefs take shape, strengthen or falter are often implicit factors not easily detectable.

The research, in this sense, does not seek to uncover an 'objective' history of changing beliefs. But how contemporary and past experience, and political ideology, help formulate and perpetuate radical consciousness. Thus, we do not seek to examine lifestyles or voting habits, as such, but the degree of political awareness and articulacy in actors' world views.

In the examination of radical belief, therefore, the primary considerations are not those of the facticity of historical or contemporary assertion, but how experiential and impressionistic assumptions underlie the way the miners interpret and render coherent their lives and the world in which they live. Yet, further, the concern is how the real or imagined past becomes concrete present through its inclusion in thought and action. Central to this, therefore, is the role of history as a legacy, involved in the production and reproduction of such orientations. We seek to examine the realm of the perceptual, therefore, to



establish also how events of the past are seen and understood. The usage of the term 'history', which shall be discussed more fully in the next chapter, is thus used in two contexts; as both that lived experience within which beliefs are formed, and as a body of knowledge about the past that acts as a mechanism in the formation of belief. Central to this is the degree of grounding a miner may have within the industry and locality; for long-term placing in the Fife mining industry may have crucial consequences for the depth of knowledge within which identity and belief formation takes place.

As we saw in the first section of this chapter, the concept of the radical region acts to locate studies within a specific spatial setting. Such works, by concentrating on specific regions, can greatly add to our knowledge on the particularistic formation of consciousness and patterns of behaviour. Yet although work such as that of Cooke claims to engage in a spatially-temporally located analysis, and seeks to show how pre-existing relations affected the specific nature of the regions examined, he fails, by concentrating on the structural level, to highlight the ways in which this past is experienced by actors. The ways in which this may occur are pointed to by Elliott and McCrone:-

... we require a sharp appreciation of politics as process, as a continuous set of struggles; for today's conflicts draw upon and are in some measure shaped by the legacies of earlier battles. In local politics there are 'legacies' of a material kind in the form of particular sorts or levels of public goods and public services won in prior struggles. There are legacies in the form of organisations and institutions through which opinion has been mobilised before; there are legacies of personal and institutional contacts, networks that can be drawn upon when the need arises; and beneath all this, there are legacies of ideals, ideas and symbols that play an important part in the political discourse in any region or city[43].

The history of the Fife miners shows us that, on the material and political levels, these legacies would appear to have been sustained over time; that is, that there is a continuity over time in the organisations and activities of the miners, but that these



are affected by changing historical circumstances; as contemporary social actuality affects the imagery which interacts with the radical discourse. The concept of an historical legacy is central to this, being the means by which the class memory acts to reproduce radical values and consciousness. Further, it is held that this is the crucial point at which the individual is located within the history of the radical region, for it is the inter-relationship between familial history and that of the radical region that acts as a vital source of self-identity; that is, that familial history ties actors into time and space. Thus, one's methodology must be competent to uncovering how this is achieved and experienced.

It is for these reasons that 'quantitative', 'representative' and 'ethnographic' methodologies were rejected. Whether historically or contemporarily, quantitative analysis on strike behaviour or political affiliation, for example, as indicators of radical behaviour, are felt to be inadequate to the task of uncovering the mechanisms underlying beliefs; whilst doubtless able to uncover broad trends in continuing behaviour. 'Representative' sampling was rejected largely for two reasons. Firstly, it would be impossible to discover the exact ideological positions of miners across different generations and, secondly, that this would reduce the sample to 'master statuses', locked into pre-determined categories. Both of these approaches, it is felt, tend to simplify beliefs into ideal-typical statements about the larger group, rather than uncover subjective meanings. The ethnographic approach was rejected for the reasons mentioned above; namely, that the research does not seek to offer descriptive accounts of miners' lifestyles, but uncover patterns within subjective orientations.

It is believed, therefore, that the task in hand can best be met by qualitative approaches which would enable the miners to articulate their world views at length. In such a way one can best unravel the complex relationships existing between subjective and objective conditions for action; implicit and explicit

political ideas, and the ways in which history is, or has been, experienced, viewed or used.

To this end forty formal semi-structured, extended interviews were carried out between February 1986 and August 1987, and constant informal contact was maintained with the coalfield. Seeking to discover the relationship between work, community, Union and politics over time several indicators were identified which could be used as variables in the analysis.

Five factors were held to be of significance in relation to the sample - regional origins, industrial origins, politics, union involvement and age. The importance of these factors is clear. Through regional and industrial background, we can identify how 'immersed' a respondent is within the history of the radical region; through politics we can establish gradations of political knowledge and belief among the sample, and uncover how politics affects a person's world view; through Union position we can identify activists and correlate this to political belief, and through age establish different objective factors in experience over time.

As can be seen from Graph 2.1, 27 of the 40 miners interviewed originated from Fife, by which one required to have been born in Fife and have at least one parent also from the county. The purpose of this distinction was to enable one to determine whether the individual was likely to have a reasonable grasp of the history of the area through generational contact. It is interesting to note, in this regard, that 13 of the Fifers were communists, and that only 6 Fifers were politically-unaligned. Thus regional background would appear to correlate strongly to political alignment.

The second factor relates more specifically to allow one to estimate access to mining traditions and history through familial experience. In the sample, 32 were from mining families, of whom 23 were also Fifers. Mining families were defined as those



GRAPH 2.1  
KEY INDICES RELATING TO THE SAMPLE

	20- 30	30- 40	40- 50	50- 60	60- 70	70+	CP	xCP	LP	xLP	PU	UO	xUO	NP	MF	N-MF	Fr	N-Fr
<hr/>																		
<u>Age</u>																		
20-30	8						2	1	1	-	4	4	1	3	4	4	6	2
30-40		7					2	-	4	-	1	6	-	1	6	1	4	3
40-50			8				-	-	2	2	4	6	-	2	8	-	6	2
50-60				6			5	-	1	-	-	4	1	1	4	2	4	2
60-70					7		4	1	2	-	-	6	-	1	7	-	5	2
70+						4	4	-	-	-	-	3	-	1	4	-	2	2
<hr/>																		
<u>Politics</u>																		
Communist Party							17					13	1	3	16	1	13	4
ex-CP								2				1	1	-	2	-	2	-
Labour Party									10			10	-	-	9	1	5	5
ex-LP										2		2	-	-	2	-	2	-
Politically Unaligned											9	3	-	6	4	5	6	3
<hr/>																		
<u>Union</u>																		
Official												29	-	-	28	1	19	10
ex-Official													2	-	-	2	1	1
No Position														9	5	4	7	2
<hr/>																		
<u>Background</u>																		
Mining Family															33	-	24	9
Non-Mining Family																7	3	4
Fifer																	27	-
Non-Fifer.																		13

• Those born outwith Fife or whose parents both were. 1 parent counts for Fifer.  
NB: Categories self-correlating give total number in that category.

wherein the present miner was at least the third generation of males to enter the pits. Of the 8 men not from mining families, it is interesting to note that 5 were politically unaligned, and of the other 3 one was an ex-communist, the second a communist from a communist non-mining family and the last was a Labour Party man whose father had been in the ILP. Again, a background within the industry would appear to indicate a stronger propensity for political alignment.

In relation to politics, the sample was placed along a radical/non-radical continuum along which were placed 47.5% who were communists, [including two ex-Party members] and 30% who were Labour Party members, [including two ex-members]. The remaining 22.5% were politically unaligned, though all were Labour voters.

In accordance with the argument stated above, the sample was not chosen to be 'representative' of the collectivity as a whole but sought to identify self-defined radicals of different ages in order to determine which mechanisms were crucial in consciousness formation over time. As has been stated, political beliefs appear to be closely tied to regional and occupational background. Of the 19 communists, all but one came from a mining background, and 15 of these were Fifers. Again, among the Labour Party members, only one was not from a mining background, and there were only 5 non-Fifers. Concentration was focused upon these politically-aligned radicals, therefore, in order to highlight the processes by which they formulated and reproduced their political belief, but an attempt was also made to identify the meaning their politics held to their lives and sense of identity. Yet as, following Popitz et al, it was believed that it was important to gain access to the gradations in belief, a small proportion of politically unaligned miners were interviewed, in order to make comparisons with the larger sample.

However, the definition of 'radical' and non-radical' is a relative one. All of those interviewed were either Labour or, if there was a candidate standing, communist voters. All the men



employed at the time had stayed on strike for the entirety of the national strike of 1984-85. In this sense, all of the sample were 'radicals'. The sample, therefore, despite its internal differences and complexity, is a strategic, particularistic one, from which one cannot generalise onto a larger body. Yet the aim was that if one could establish the mechanisms and problems involved in sustaining radical consciousness and values over time in this radical sample, one may be able to highlight the problems involved in consciousness formation for the broader British working class.

In respect of union involvement, 32 of the 40 were either union officials at the time of interview or at the time at which they had left the industry, or were ex-union officials. Of those 31 who either were, or had been members of a political party only 2 had not held union positions, both of whom were old communists who had become disenchanted with what they viewed as the corruption of the Adamsonian FKCMA. Of the three politically-unaligned miners who held a union position, one was about to join the Labour Party, one has a communist father and was only newly politicised, and the last was engaged in fund-raising for the Labour Party and appeared to be deciding between joining that or the Communist Party.

The last characteristic was that of age. The sample ranged between 87 to 24 years; 23 being between 24-50 and 17 over 50 years. This factor is held to be crucial to the investigation for by questioning the miners on generational relationships it was hoped that one could establish the importance of historical knowledge as a conduit through which a radical consciousness could be transmitted. To this end, therefore, were placed 8 fathers and sons, in order to examine inter-generational similarity. Of these only one couple were not in the same party, the son being only newly politicised and, as yet, still unaligned; this was a family with a non-mining background from Ayrshire. The centrality of generational factors can further be demonstrated through the fact that of all the politically-aligned miners, all except 2 either had fathers or close kin within the same party, except those whose

fathers were absent during childhood. These latter can best be represented as having a 'communal father', in that in all such cases the family were either supported or cared for by the miners' union.

This question of inter-generational, and, indeed, intra-generational conditions is vital in analysing how the perceptions and experiences of the different generations interact to form historical understandings and identities. Thus change and perception of change form the central orientation within which to comprehend the development of radical consciousness in Fife. To this end, one must further elucidate the ways in which history and time are to be understood.



## CHAPTER THREE.

## TIME AND RADICAL CONSCIOUSNESS.

3.1 Introduction.

In the previous chapter it was seen that the Fife miners appear to have been able to sustain a radical consciousness and world view within changing historical circumstances. Consequently, if this consciousness has been reproduced within the flow of time, any attempt to analyse this must not be disengaged from this dynamic, but must be located within it in order to understand the circumstances from which, and in which, it is created. Yet, apart from the analysis of consciousness formation in relation to changing experiential factors, it is also necessary to resolve two key issues; namely, the ways in which the miners understand and make use of this history within time, and the means by which the reproduction of radical consciousness is enabled. By understanding how a sense of history is utilised, and the particular representation that is made of that history to explain themselves and their lives, we can facilitate our understandings of the centrality of history to identity and beliefs. Thus, we must attempt to understand the importance of the historical moment and the use of history within that moment.

3.2 Actors in History: Actors as Historians.

The first prerequisite is to acknowledge the placing of actors within the constraints of spatio-temporally fixed conditions, for as Abrams argues, "whatever reality society has is an historical reality, a reality in time[1]." The choices individuals make, the beliefs and attitudes to which they come are, most obviously, rooted within the historical moment, or what Heller would call the 'historical present'[2]. As Mills reminds us:-

... the biographies of men and women, the kinds of individuals they variously become, cannot be understood without reference to the historical structures in which the milieux of their everyday life are organised. Historical transformations carry

meanings not only for individual ways of life, but for the very character - the limits and possibilities of the human being[3].

It is in this crudest of senses that we can understand the relationship between objective and subjective understandings; that is, the structuring of human capabilities by the material world in which they find themselves. Yet these objective circumstances, in addition to placing the individual within the historical moment, are, themselves, the outcome of previous historical configurations. Thus, actors are always located within a dynamic of past and present, for the present is the sum of the experiences of the historical past. In this sense, actors are historical subjects in that their actions take place within historically-determined conditions. As Mills argues:-

... we cannot adequately understand 'man' as an isolated biological creature, as a bundle of reflexes or a set of instincts, as an 'intelligible field' or a system in and of itself. Whatever else he may be, man is a social and historical actor who must be understood, if at all, in close and intricate interplay with social and historical structures[4].

Yet if this location within the flow of time makes individuals historical subjects, they are also, as a consequence of this, historians; that is, that the conditions in which beliefs are formed, decisions are made and action carried out are, by their very nature, historical ones. It is in this sense that we can understand the meaning of Heller's statement that, whilst we are not all academics, "We are historians. We all are[5]." That is, that human consciousness must be seen as the result of the selection and interpretation of circumstances which are historically-determined. As Abrams argues:-

Process is the link between action and structure.... what we choose to do and what we have to do are shaped by the historically given possibilities among which we find ourselves[6].

All knowledge, therefore, is in some sense historical knowledge; for it draws on the past in its formation. Yet this knowledge is



also the outcome of immediate concerns and issues. Thus, if the past exists in the present, and is intimately bound-up in human perception, the understanding of this is also determined by the needs of the present; that is, understandings of the past are based within contemporary experience. What requires explanation is how this history is mobilised in the present, and the ways in which it is felt, experienced and given meaning by actors within the context of everyday life.

### 3.3 Situated History.

Central to the concept of 'situated history' is the idea that history provides the rules and resources within which actors formulate beliefs and identity in given spatio-temporal circumstances. The history upon which they draw is a 'timeless history'; that is, it is the past as a temporally-unstructured cultural repertoire used, at will, to provide sense, example or legitimation for consciousness and action. History is a common remembered past mobilised to deal with the present; a purposive history, utilised to understand the world and to structure perceptions of society, and the actor's role and potentiality for action, within it. Timeless history, therefore, is a legacy, a sense of the past mobilised in the present to provide meaning and context to actors' lives. Yet, through its spatially-fixed nature, it also locates them within a continuum filled with the lives and experiences of others that they can understand in relation to themselves and with whom they can identify. Timeless history is thus a pool of resources which helps shape identity and the formulation of belief, yet the point of instantiation is not timeless but temporally situated within given material circumstances. It is in this sense that we can talk of situated history: the utilisation of history in the present.

This concept may be taken on various levels. In the first instance, it may help us understand the way in which contemporary experience is located within a sense of the past; that is, how new experiences are fitted into what is known about the world. Thus,



the present may be understood in terms of the past and what is seen as familiar. In this sense, the framework of meaning formulated in reference to the past, and to make sense of that past, may live on as the framework within which new conditions are understood. Through an awareness and understanding of the past, therefore, actors may gain greater insights into current circumstances. Bauman, for example, emphasises how historical memory is crucially related to the sense actors make of their surroundings in everyday life. He argues:-

Concepts tend to outlive the historical configurations which gave them birth and infused them with meaning. This tendency is rooted in the natural propensity to absorb and accommodate new experience into the familiar picture of the world; habitual categories are the main tools of this absorption[7].

Therefore, the present, at a fundamental level, is understood in reference to the already known. But also, as has been noted, whilst the world in which we live is essentially historical, providing us with a vast legacy of previous experience, the use that is made of this is dependent upon contemporary experience; that is, the use of history is, above all, situated within present conditions. Thus, whilst the sum of historical knowledge is a resource drawn upon to make sense of the world in the present, thereby rendering our understandings historical, our understanding of history is always contemporary; being rooted in everyday life. Heller's concept of 'everyday historical consciousness' is useful in this connection in that it stresses the grounding of history within the context of lived experience. There is consequently a two-way interplay between the past and present, whereby the present is located within the past, and, at the same time, this past is mobilised in order to better understand the present. The way in which this history is utilised is dependent upon the interpretation placed upon it in relation to present concerns. Our understandings of the past, therefore, will always be shaped by the historical moment within which we are situated when



instantiating the historical legacy. As Carr informs us:-

... we can view the past, and achieve our understanding of the past, only through the eyes of the present. The historian is of his own age, and is bound to it by the conditions of human existence[8].

Drawn upon in spatio-temporally located circumstances, therefore, our understanding of history is crucially determined by those conditions, and reflects our present concerns. Consequently, if the history drawn upon in situated context is structured by everyday life, and is part of the attempt to bring comprehension and order to the lives of actors, what is remembered tells us who and what they are, and the issues that are central to their lives. Again, Carr argues:-

My purpose here is to illustrate two important truths: first, that you cannot fully understand or appreciate the work of the historian unless you have first grasped the standpoint from which he himself approached it; secondly, that that standpoint is itself rooted in a social and historical period[9].

Thus, whilst the historical legacy is timeless, existing outwith temporal considerations as a pool of resources, the concept of situated history is, by its very nature, rooted in circumstances which are historically variable. The utilisation of the historical legacy is thus mutable, as altering objective conditions require differing interpretation. Differing generations within social groups may thus, by their very location within specific historical moments, use their historical past in different ways for varying purposes. In this way, whilst history provides a frame of meaning from which to make sense of the world and locate one's life, the things that require being made sense of are constantly changing. History, therefore, may be encapsulated in selective ways for particular historical purposes which change over time, and both enduring and particular historical configurations may exist within the concerns of social groups. As Heller argues:-

Every recollection of what is bygone is an interpretation: we reconstruct our past. What we reconstruct, how we reconstruct it, what kind of sense we attribute to the reconstructed, all

this changes with our experiences, with our interest, with the measure of our sincerity and insincerity. In brief, we change our past via selective interpretation[10].

Our sense of history thus, as Wright informs us, has an allegiance that is "unashamedly to the present[11]," yet this knowledge is not total, for we have not a complete comprehension of the past, but is a selective representation based upon what is regarded as important. As Heller argues:-

If we make sense of something, we in fact distinguish 'essential' from 'inessential'. Here, 'essential' means 'important' or 'real', and so, 'inessential' may mean either 'unimportant' or 'apparent'[12].

The past is, in this way, an evaluation based upon decisions that show what is to be seen as of relevance to our lives and understandings. An historical legacy, therefore, rather than being a sum of all previous experience, is a history of what is counted as significant.

### 3.4 Significant History.

The expression of the past that comes to be regarded as history has crucial consequences for the identity and beliefs of those subscribing to it. Rather, Williams tells us in a discussion of tradition, than being "a relatively inert, historicised segment of the social structure: tradition as the surviving past[13]," as it is portrayed in Marxist cultural thought, it is an active, shaping force. He argues that tradition:-

... is always more than an inert, historicised segment; indeed it is the most powerful practical means of incorporation. What we have to see is not just 'a tradition' but a **selective tradition**: an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification[14].

What comes to be viewed as history, therefore, is only one of many possible histories: it is based upon a certain interpretation of



the past. The past is selected. Williams continues:-

From a whole possible area of past and present, in a particular culture, certain meanings and practices are selected for emphasis and certain other meanings and practices are neglected or excluded[15].

The bases upon which inclusion or exclusion takes place are those of what is seen as significant; whether by providing an understanding of the social order, group identity, norms for thought and behaviour, legitimation for present arrangements or whatever. An historical legacy is consequently not the sum of objective facts, but of elements from the past which best explain actors' lives and their particular environment. Significant history refers to an encapsulated history, a simplification which offers an interpretation of the world. As Thompson argues:-

... what is needed is a simplified, stylised account which concentrates on the meaning of the story. The time-limit thus marks a great sorting-out process, in which some stories are discarded, and others are synthesized, restructured and stereotyped[16].

However, this significant history, is not viewed by adherents as being a particularistic interpretation, but as being a total interpretation. As Bauman argues:-

The historical memory of a group which has been ploughed into its collective actions, which finds its expression in the group's proclivities to some rather than other behavioural responses, is not necessarily recognised by the group as a particular concept of the past[17].

A sense of history is, therefore, central to the construction of a particularistic orientation of the social world. Such a history of the significant cannot be discounted as 'untrue', even if not strictly or necessarily 'factual', but should rather be seen as offering universalistic explanations of the world; a generalised conception of broad historical conditions which is mobilised to understand ongoing historical processes. It is this sum of significant factors which make up the sum of the timeless history as a pool of resources.



It is in this context that Heller's conceptualisation of the stages of historical consciousness is a useful one. Her concept of 'unreflected generality' can facilitate an understanding of significant history as an encapsulation of a particular world view. This stage, the first of five she identifies, is concerned with the myths explaining beginnings. It gives an account of how and why particular systems come into being. Generality, in this account, "means that the genesis of the system of values, habits and institutions of the group in question encompasses in its projects the genesis of the world, the universe as such[18]." It thereby provides all the answers to existence. Further, the stories concerned with the myth are expressions of the collective consciousness attempting to give coherence to man's understandings. She argues:-

The myth of genesis is also the **image of the world order**. It not only explains our being, it also arranges our experiences. These patterns are rational in so far as they ensure the smooth process of reproduction for the individual and the collectivity. One understands the world and acts in terms of this framework[19].

The myth, however, is also a normative statement. It sets out the standards and expectations for the behaviour of the collectivity:-

The motive of lesson is omnipresent in myths. Since genesis legitimises the existing order as the order of existence, myth tells us what we ought to do and what we have to avoid, what we should fear and what we can hope. The transgressions committed by mythological figures are **warnings** for the believers. The interplay of fate and human activity gains momentum[20].

This conceptualisation bears important parallels with the idea of a significant history. Firstly, it deals with an archetypal explanation encapsulated and highlighted by particular stories. Secondly, the importance of the interpretation is thus not in its facticity but in its portrayal of an ideal statement about how and why life is as it is. It provides an account of social being, order, norms and values. It makes reference to what may be called a 'transcendental value system' which expresses values which are held worthy, and which bears resemblance to what Barrington Moore



refers to as the demand for 'decent moral treatment' which he found among German workers in the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries[21].

Thus, significant history, like Heller's concept, provides a particularistic account grounded within the concerns of the collectivity. It is a general account of what has gone before, but which is crucially tied to philosophical questions about the nature of reality. Consequently, a history of the significant is of interest not merely for its provision of a 'history' of past events but, rather, its importance lies in the account that it offers of what is central to the lives of the group, and the way in which the group perceives itself. It is this in sense that one can argue that an awareness of historical understanding is crucial to the consciousness and identity of actors not because it gives an account of the objective history of the group, but because it offers a perceptual framework within which to make sense of one's life, and in which one can develop social beliefs, identity and action. The significant history, therefore, is, above all, a particularistic world view within which actors ground their lives.

### 3.5 Radical Consciousness and History.

If significant history offers a world view for the collectivity which is selective in its interpretation, and provides a particular value system within its framework, this is unsystematised in the sense that it is not explicitly political; that is, whilst it may provide a general account which may be implicitly political in orientation, this is not overtly formulated but covertly expressed. As we have seen, a significant history is not perceived as such by its adherents, who view it as an objective account of the past. Thus, whilst acting to reinforce a particularistic interpretation of the world rendering coherent the grounded experiences of the collectivity within the historical moment, this interplay between past and present is unperceived.



However, 'objective' history and the unsystematised world view encapsulated within the significant history are mutually reinforcing. The objective history must provide, most obviously, the basic experience from which particularistic orientations develop, yet this latter, through its historical selectivity, then acts back to legitimise this view. Thus, whilst there is an objective history, this merely provides the raw materials from which interpretations are formed, through the highlighting and encapsulation of events which conform to the world view developed, in the first instance, from historical experience.

This, most clearly, has important ramifications for radical consciousness. The potentiality for such beliefs is rooted within present experience, yet, as we have discovered, this is, in itself, the outcome of the historical past. Consequently, radical consciousness is inherently historical in its formation, in that the conditions for its existence are historically given. Yet this past also provides a pool of resources from which to define that consciousness in a subjective sense; that is, the past is drawn upon to provide the examples, justifications and identity which reinforce the radical consciousness. Radical consciousness, therefore, has a close relationship with the past as the foundations on which it is built. As The Popular Memory Group inform us:-

For memory is, by definition, a term which directs our attention not to the past but to the **past-present relation**. It is because 'the past' matters so much politically. As 'the past' - dead, gone or only **subsumed** in the present - it matters much less[22].

Radical consciousness, therefore, may develop from objective circumstances which are rendered coherent by radical interpretations, that is, which make sense of that experience, but the radical world view then draws upon those circumstances to legitimise its own position. Should life experience engender the continuation of the radical presence over time within a collectivity through continued applicability, the potentiality for this mutual reinforcement clearly increases as radical activity



becomes incorporated within the objective history of the group. Should the conditions which lay the foundations for the radical consciousness change, and thus diminish its relevancy for actors, then adherence to the radical world view would decline; though the radical history may be played out over time through its presence within the objective history.

The radical consciousness, as such, provides a formalised, articulated explanation of the unsystematised world view found within historical understandings, and has a similar relationship to 'objective' history as this latter. The implicit imagery drawn from the historical past is further rendered coherent by politicised accounts of what has occurred, and why. As such, radical philosophies must be in accord with the basic premises of the significant history to which they add the political dimension. Significant history may consequently either be provided with additional meaning by the radical philosophy, or, should this latter gain widespread legitimacy, come to define that significant history. Overall, therefore, the significant history, whilst laying foundations for radical consciousness, may become subsumed in such radical accounts. In this sense, a sense of the past bears close correlation to the concept of social imagery we discussed in Chapter One.

Yet the historical past has a further function for a radical consciousness, by providing a foundation of example from which to draw in order to engage in action in the future; that is, the past is used to work out potentialities for the present and the future. By examining from whence we came, we can form understandings of where we are going. Thus, a vision of the future comes from definitions of the past. If radical consciousness can provide a sense of enrichment by locating individuals within a particular history and instilling identity from that, it also provides a sense of purpose for the future. Consequently, a vision of the future, to which we must escape from the conditions of the past and present, places radicals within a past/present/future



continuum. The present is a slender moment on this continuum. As Carr argues:-

... the present has no more than a notional existence as an imaginary dividing line between the past and the future.... since past and future are part of the same time-span, interest in the past and interest in the future are interconnected. The line of demarcation between pre-history and historical times is crossed when people cease to live only in the present, and become consciously interested both in their past and their future. History begins with the handing down of tradition; and tradition means the carrying of the habits and lessons of the past into the future.... Good historians, I suspect, whether they think about it or not, have the future in their bones. Besides the question, Why?, the historian also asks the question, Whither?[23].

Thus, if we extrapolate from Carr's ideas about historians once again, we can understand how the temporal continuum exists within each historical moment. This idea is well-expressed within Heller's concept of 'togetherness' which refers to the intimate relationship of the past/present/future configuration:-

Every 'just now', 'now', and 'being now' is 'being together', **togetherness**. We are together with those living since we too are living, since we act and think for them and against them. We are together with the dead in so far as we tell their stories, and we are together with those not-yet-born in so far as they live in us as a promise or as faith[24].

Within the radical consciousness, therefore, it is the desire for social change and a better society which makes history so central, as it is from historical awareness that the possibilities for this future are formed; either by emphasis, comparison, rejection or whatever. Thus, radicals may be expected to be those with greater awareness of the historical past due to the importance of this for future aspirations. The crucial role of history to radical consciousness is expressed by The Popular Memory Group:-

Generally, as Gramsci argued, a sense of history must be one element in a strong popular socialist culture. It is one means by which an organic social group acquires a knowledge of the larger context of its collective struggles, and becomes capable of a wider transformative role in the society. Most important of all, perhaps, it is the means by which we may become self-conscious about the formation of our common-sense beliefs, those that we appropriate from our immediate social



and cultural milieu. These beliefs have a history and are also produced in determinate processes. The point is to recover their 'inventory'... in order that, their origin and tendency known, they may be consciously adopted, rejected or modified. In this way a popular historiography, especially a history of the commonest forms of consciousness, is a necessary aspect of the struggle for a better world[25].

Consequently, the usefulness of the historical past is ultimately connected to the end goal of history - the future. Once again, Heller's work provides useful ideas in this area, with her concept of the third stage of historical consciousness, that of 'unreflected universality'. This stage is an idealist one relating to the goal of history. She argues:-

The consciousness of universal myth is the unreflected consciousness of **historical totality**. It offers a homogeneous and final answer to the existential question of historicity ('where have we come from, what are we, where are we going?').... Future is not only part of, but is also the **purpose** of history; it is its **accomplishment** and its **end**. It is no longer an uncertainty, the threat of collapse that may be avoided, but the certainty, the unavoidable outcome[26].

Thus radical consciousness may be a central means by which a significant history is located within a theory of progression; that is, a teleological analysis. Radical consciousness is, therefore, crucially related to history, in the sense that history is crucially related to time. Yet if both the significant history and radical consciousness are to be perpetuated over time they must be able to draw on mechanisms capable of their reproduction. Central to this within everyday life are generational relationships.

### 3.6 Generational Relationships and Historical Transmission.

If an historical legacy is to be reproduced over time in a collectivity, then clearly a vital mechanism in this will be that of generational relationships; that is, that the transmission of a cultural repertoire will be part of the informal socialisation process. Generational contact, therefore, whilst helping to provide individuals with the social skills necessary to interact



in society, may also act to place the individual within the flow of historical time. It is through this process that individuals are able to construct a personal identity, yet this is also inherently social in nature by locating the individual within time and space. Many commentators point to the centrality of the narrative in instilling actors with the means to engage socially with their environment in a general sense, yet there are also observations which identify how this may generate historical identity:-

... the cultural features of accounts are not simply the product of individual authorship; they draw on general cultural repertoires, features of language and codes of expression which help to determine what may be said, how and to what effect. In charting such repertoires, we might start, for example, from the repeated observation of the centrality of story-telling to working-class accounts of social reality. More or less extended narratives about past events, often of an intimate and always of a personal kind, are certainly one elementary form of popular memory and the commonest way in which past and present are compared and evaluated[27].

The informal learning process is consequently an historical one, therefore, for the past acts as a pool of information on which to draw. It is through narrative that history becomes part of the present. As Heller informs us:-

[A story] is relative because the narrator speaks in the present: we listen to the narrative in the present, we cry and laugh in the present. We relive times bygone in the present, making them our present[28].

Thus, generational contact, that is, contact with older generations, is a crucial means through which a sense of the past becomes part of the present and acts to instill an identity which links these together. Heller stresses the identification process that can result from narrative, in the sense that the listener comes to ingest the story of the teller, and to make it part of themselves:-

The listener becomes a **participant**, with his or her personality being 'built into' the story of the other. If someone listens to the same story several times, complete identification with the subject of the story may take place, and it might happen that one will later tell the same story as



if it had happened to him or her. This is not dishonesty, but the outcome of a continuous interplay between narrator and listener; an interplay evidenced by the very process of identification[29].

It can be seen that such an eventuality may be the more easily enabled within the close generational relationships of family ties; the constant contact which results in participants hearing the same story of the past told for different audiences of which one is a part, for statutory lesson, or merely because the teller has forgotten that the tale has been told before. Yet if individuals are tied into familial biography by such relationships, and so define personal historical identity, they also provide social identity by locating them within the groups to which the family belongs. As such, they are historical and social stories; placing actors within the workplace, community or whatever. As Strauss informs us, "identities imply not merely personal histories but also social histories... individuals hold memberships in groups that are themselves products of the past[30]." In this way personal and group biographies interact over time. The histories touch, and serve to integrate the personal histories into that of collectivity and region. This located nature of historical knowledge, therefore, relates directly to the concept of the radical region discussed in the last chapter, for it is a sense of the past situated within the spatial setting of locality and group membership. Thus, the sense of self is ultimately both a social and an historical identity, inseparable within the temporal continuum which ties individuals to their past and present. It is in this sense that we can understand Abrams comment:-

The idea of the succession of generations emphasises both the historical location and the historical continuity of the process with which we are concerned. The problem of generations, in turn, is a problem of the mutual phasing of two different calendars: the calendar of the life-cycle of the individual and the calendar of historical experience[31].

Yet, as we have seen, the historical identity generated by such mechanisms is a selective one which may merely indicate what is important to older generations. Whether this significant history



is accepted and reproduced is ultimately dependent on the continuing relevance of that particular interpretation of the world. As such, it may be that the particularistic lessons from the past either temporarily or permanently decline in importance. It is in this sense that we may say that generational transmission may only be legitimised if its message is found appropriate over time, and helps individuals make continuing sense of their world and its concerns. The perpetuation of a systemised radical consciousness must likewise be dependent upon relevancy, but there must be an articulate world view available to individuals which is capable of tying personal and collective history to politics.

As we have seen, it is the radicals within the sample who are the most firmly rooted within the radical region, and thus better placed to draw upon the significant history of the Fife miners through familial and occupational location. If generational transmission is a crucial mechanism in cultural and political reproduction, we would, therefore, expect to find a willingness to accept the historical legacy of the past among the radicals in the target area. Yet, further, if this historical legacy is central to radical understandings, as the raw material upon which systematisation occurs, there will be a disparity of historical awareness between radicals and non-radicals; for it will be the radicals who most 'require' the significant history to enrich their political understandings. It will be the task of the ensuing chapters to examine the nature of the relationship between the past and radical consciousness. For the moment, we shall briefly seek to establish whether the arguments put forward so far accord with the miners' views on history and generations, and indicate key differences between elements of the sample which shall be referred in a more specific and detailed fashion later.

### 3.7 Over to the Miners.

As we have seen in the last chapter the Fife miners have displayed evidence of radical consciousness over time. As was noted, all of the miners interviewed were on strike for the entire year in



1984-85, and most were either politically affiliated and/or union officials. However, there was a minority who were neither, and it is among this group that we would expect to find a lesser awareness of the historical past and an historical identity. Evidence which appears to support this comes from research into very different types of worker than those under discussion.

The work of both Goldthorpe, et al in Luton and Sennett and Cobb in Boston are useful examples[32]. Neither of these studies deal specifically with class conscious or politically-active groups but are concerned with what may be seen as privatised workers, displaying instrumentalism in work attitudes. Work is seen in terms of payment rather than intrinsic satisfaction or group identity for the vast majority of those studied, with emotional fulfilment coming from the private sphere. What is of interest in relation to the issues at hand is that these workers appear to have little, if not no, sense of historical placement or development, but seem to live in a one-dimensional temporal world concerned purely with the present. Whilst neither of these works were geared to uncovering attitudes of the past, and so thus may give us an ahistorical picture due to the framework within which interviewing took place, it does, at least superficially seem to support the argument for a relationship between political radicalism and historical knowledge. As such, we would expect those with a lesser degree of political articulation to accord more with this pattern.

As was noted in the previous section, the creation of identity is both a personal and social phenomenon tying actors into both past and present. It was indicated that a key factor in this is generational interaction. As we also saw in the last chapter, nearly all the sample had followed the political affiliation of their close kin. This, in itself, would appear to indicate the strength of generational transmission as a conduit for radical consciousness. Support for this idea can be seen from the



following quotation from a 33 year old communist:-

Gae doon tae an area, say the likes o' Oxford, or some place in England, ye know, and the rural scenery and what no'. Ye mention 1926, ye know, they'd probably say, "Oh, it was a guid year fur wine," or a bad year, ye know, or something like that. But ye mention it up here, 1926, even tae the young men, it meant a **helluva** big struggle. They might no' understond it, they might no' understond the full implications o' the 1926 strike, but they **know** that the 1926 strike was a big thing in Cowdenbeath because their **grandads** were involved, or their **dads** were involved, and their dads tell them tales o' when they were wee nippers and they were doon at the soup-kitchens, and gaeing ontae the bings and ge'ing coal. So it was there. And gaeing intae the pubs and the clubs, and ah used tae love it, ye know, gaeing intae the pubs, and ye get some o' the ald buddies si'ing there. "What did yoo dae in '26?" And ye've got the tales o' pinching the sheep, and derailling coal-wagons and, ye know, so the class-consciousness thing was sortae ge'ing passed on.

In this way we can see how both familial and communal narrative acts as a mechanism for historical transmission locating individuals within their communal and regional history. Yet this quotation also shows the content of this reproduction in Fife; that is, it displays a portrayal of regional history that is based on hardship and conflict. It is this past which is held to be a major reason for the continuing radical consciousness of the Fife miners. As one 55 year old communist argues in relation to the 1984-85 strike:-

Ah think the militancy o' the Fife miners in **that** strike is, in fact, a na'ural process fra' **previous** strikes and **previous** struggles o' their feythers and grandfeythers. Ah mean, the lad, Brian Easton, we talked aboot, who was the Secretary o' the Strike Commi'ee in **this** strike, his grandfeyther was imprisoned in 1921 fur his role in the strike that took place at **that** time. There's a cer'ain historical tradition.

If this historical legacy continues within the region, one must, therefore, discover what it means for the younger generation who have assimilated this tradition. One 38 year old Labour Party member explains:-

[A sense o' history] makes **me** proud, and ah **am** proud tae be a miner. Proud tae be brought-up in a mining communi'y. Proud o' being the son o' a miner. Ah think ah'm proud because **ma** feyther had tae struggle. It makes ye proud, that **he** fought



fur onything he got, and ah'm the same. Onything ah've got ah've warked fur. Naebody's gave onything tae me. Ah get alot o' sa'isfaction ootae that. Nothing's been hondded tae me on a plate.

These quotations indicate two things; that there is a sense of continuity between generations based on similar experience and, relatedly, that the miners, in a fundamental sense, are **made** by their past, and that the significant history that they draw upon is based around the communal and occupational hardships of their forefathers which continues into the present. It is thus a particularistic conception of their present and past. Yet it is also inherently political, in that the legacy is oppositional in tone. The knowledge that it provides facilitates a certain orientation to the world. One 72 year old communist explains the effects that such transmission has, and how some attempt consciously to enhance this historical understanding:-

[Knowledge o' the past] affects [their actions]. Ye are yoo. Ye are conscious. Most o' them try and learn fra' the past, and they have some bi'erness fra' the past, as well as some great **examples** fra' the past. And these remain wi' ye all yur life, these examples. The examples o' treachery as well as the examples o' extreme solidarity stay wi' ye all yur life. There's a determination tae live up tae the past. That they will no' be lesser men.

This quotation serves to indicate that the significant history is not merely relevant for its objective details of the past, but for the overall world view it provides; that is, that it gives a way of understanding the world of the miners. It teaches of class relations, positive and negative values, and the whole legacy and continuing necessity of collectivism to the miners' lives. Thus, the history transmitted is not just a material history, but an ideological and political history capable of rendering the world coherent. It is essentially normative. In this sense, to seek knowledge of the past, as is indicated in the above quotation, is, in essence, to seek a political education. This may be implicitly transmitted through the legacy, or may serve as the basis for a more coherent understanding.



This consciousness and determination to seek such knowledge can best be seen among young radicals. It is such miners that, in accordance with earlier arguments, look to the past as an example for the present and future. The past, therefore, acts as a pool of resources to be drawn-upon to show the struggles of the past and the need to continue these in order to overcome conditions that could still be improved. Yet, if this past provides an example, it also instills a moral imperative. This can be seen from the following quotation from a communist in his late 20s:-

[Coming fra' a mining femily and what ma feyther told mel affects me. It affects me in as much as tae say that ah thought ah had a du'y tae cairry it on. Tae cairry on trying tae win mair benefits and be'er conditions and that fur the miners. Because ma feyther and ma forefeythers fought fur the conditions that ah'm able tae enjoy just noo. And ah think these conditions, which are far be'er than what they had, ah think they could still be extended. So ah would say it's ma du'y tae try and be'er the conditions even further fur ma sons and fu'ure generations.

This sense of obligation to past generations and duty to the future thereby acts to locate the miners within the past/present/future continuum present in the historical moment. As such, it may be seen that the regional history is regarded as important to radicals. This would appear to be due to a continuing relevance; that the concerns of the past are the concerns of the present. Although conditions have improved, and the miners clearly live in a different world than that of their forebears, there would appear still to be a continuity of interest which renders the past applicable for the present. However, as was argued earlier, this is not necessarily so. The past may be drawn on, or not, for different things in different periods. What may be the case, therefore, is that the past has acquired a renewed relevancy in the recent past as the industry has come under assault since the 1970s. This would appear to be indicated by the following quotation from a Labour Party member in his late 30s talking in the aftermath of the strike of his father's comments in the early 1960s:-

Well, ah can mind, like ony other young guy, probably, in their teens, early teens and that, who's only thinking, maybe,



about gaeing oot. Ah can mind ma feyther spouting ontae me, telling me [about the past and hoo conflict would return tae the industry], and ah'd be saying, "Christ. Ah've heard this before," ye ken. "What is he gaeing on about it again fur?" And he used tae say tae me, "Ye'll learn. Ye'll see ah was right," ye know. And ah think everybody's dad says that, eh? And he was right. Ah can honestly say that everything he told me, it's right. Ah've experienced it all. All the things he said ha' come right.

As such, changing historical circumstances can come to acquire a renewed legitimacy, yet in so doing, also legitimise a view of the present as inherently conflictual. However, whilst historical awareness is pronounced among those with a radical consciousness, this is less the case among the minority of politically-unaligned, but labour-voting, miners. Most notably is that what knowledge such unaligned miners do have about the last does not display a keen awareness of the political aspects of the past, nor is it presented in a coherent fashion. Non-radical miners may accept the significant history of the region, for it is based in actuality, but they do so without the coherence of a systematised ideology. It would appear that, in a sense, they need historical knowledge less, because they do not need to utilise it to reinforce a radical ideology. It is, most clearly, difficult to show a lack of knowledge in quotation form but the following two quotations serve to indicate the differences that may be found between the two types, by acting to highlight the different levels of political articulacy between radicals and non-radicals. Both are talking of mining communities, the first is a left-wing Labour Party member in his 30s, the second an unaligned 26 year old:-

... through them being a solid mining area [in Central Fife] they've aye backed each other up. Ah mean, because ye **have** tae. Ah mean, ye're **pushing**, ye're **desperate**, ye need tae stond up and fight back and get organised.

Ah would say, right, if ye gae tae a mining area, they're all sortae the same. Wee villages, yur local pubs, yur club, yur bowling club, and that's about it.

These quotations serve to indicate that among the politicised the past is used to support and justify that radical position. Whereas the former draws on communal history to stress the



necessity of mutualistic values given material hardship, the second is a general statement about physical features. In this way, we can understand how radical consciousness can be perceived from the way in which the history of the Fife miners is expressed by respondents. Yet even though non-radicals may not politically articulate their past all miners interviewed, both radical and non-radical, acknowledged the historical militancy of the Fife miners. Non-radical miners are thus also aware of their past within the radical region. The difference between elements of the sample was that non-radicals could not necessarily back this belief with stories to support the claim. Compare two statements on the Fife coalfield, the first from an unaligned 41 year old, and the second from a communist in his mid-30s:-

Ah would say all mining areas will be militant. Fife's a pretty guid stranghold. Possibly they are mair militant.

Furstly, the historical background in the mining areas o' Fife is different, cer'ainly tae England, fur a varie'y o' reasons. The Lothians, ah dinnae know so much, ah think the same historical background arose there as what arose here. Ah'm talking about the early days wi' the salt-pans and the slave acts, because the salt-pans was in the Lothian coalfields as well as the Fife. So ah'd say they had mair o' less the same historical background, ye know, in terms o' coal production and the uses o' coal as what we had. Poli'ically, it could be a different thing, because Fife's ayeways been a militant area. The Fife coalfield has **ayeways** been militant. The Communist Party has ayeways had a strang influence in Fife. Ah mean, if ye look at the Fife Regional Council noo, it's one o' the most progressive councils in Scotland, if no' Britain, which reflects the Fife background. What makes us different fra' other areas, well, obviously it's the militancy.

Thus, whilst it is clearly hard to demonstrate what people do not know, the sample does indicate that among non-radicals there is less interest or awareness of the past. The sense of history is, consequently, less detailed, and knowledge is incomplete and fragmentary. This is possibly due to the fact, as noted in the last chapter, that such miners tended not to come from families closely tied into the industrial and political life of Fife, and thus have had less opportunity to acquire the historical legacy.



A further point is that non-aligned miners display less faith in their ability to affect their futures. This may be related to the argument that those with a systematised world view, developed from a life experience which motivates them towards an attempt to effect social change must, by this belief, pay closer attention to historical possibilities in the past, present and future. Consequently, the perception of control is inherent within the adherence to a radical stance. Compare the following two quotations; the first from an unaligned man in his 40s and the second a 33 year old communist:-

All ah can dae is just keep on daeing ma wark and try tae help produce mair coal. That's what ah'm there fur.

There's lots o' things ye can dae. Ye know, public campaigns tae save the coal industry. Various things ye can dae tae campaign tae save yur jobs.... at least ye're no' powerless. Ye know what ah mean, ye can gae oot on the streets and at least fight.

To sum up, this brief exploration on attitudes to history found among the Fife miners would seem to support the conclusions arrived at in previous sections; namely, that past and present are crucially related in the historical moment, but yet that this past is a selective one, for all respondents saw the past as harsh and conflictual. Yet, as we have seen, a sense of a significant history can be most readily perceived among radical miners, and this would appear to be connected to feelings of the possibility to engage in history, to actively participate in the present and future, which are tied to control, through knowledge, of the past.

### 3.8 Conclusion.

It has been argued that the usage of history is both an important way in which personal and collective identities are formed, and understandings reached about the nature of social actuality. This history, as a legacy drawn upon in action, is thus central to the ability to participate in the social world. Applied in the historical present, however, it is used selectively to deal with the concerns of the moment and is consequently subject to



different interpretation in changing material circumstances. It is in this way that it forms a pool of resources. It is a general legacy existing outwith time but applied in time. Time is important for two reasons; it is from the past that identity and beliefs are formed but it is to the future that actors struggle.

It is the perception of the continuum that appears most strongly associated with those adhering to a radical consciousness. Forming beliefs in the present, radicals selectively draw upon the past in order to affect the future. Their understanding of the past conforms to the tenets of the radical philosophy. Thus radical consciousness and history are mutually reinforcing, and come together to provide a world view wherein abstract understandings are formed and rendered coherent. 'Objective truth', as such, is unimportant, it is the totality of the world view which is crucial to the understanding of radical belief. However, as we have seen, the ability to form identity and belief would appear to depend upon generational transmission. Thus the unity of personal and collective understandings which informs the radical consciousness must be located within mechanisms facilitating its perpetuation.

Consequently, the role of the historical legacy is rooted within two prerequisites: firstly, that the radical world view is of continuing relevance to the grounded concerns of actors, providing applicable answers to contemporary questions and, secondly, that mechanisms exist which allow cultural and political reproduction. These will, however, as will the material circumstances confronting actors, change. The interrelated nature of material and perceptual factors means the objective circumstances demanding to be made sense of may also be the mechanisms which facilitate, or not, the transmission of possible answers; that is, the areas of life demanding explanation may also be those which act as transmitting mechanisms for consciousness and action.

It is in this way that we can understand the following chapters. Four factors have been identified as of key importance to the



miners' experiences and, as such, central to subjective understandings. Work, community, Union and industrial relations are seen as areas in which beliefs and identity are crucially formed. Yet, it is the continuity of experience within these that acts as a conduit for the perpetuation of radical consciousness; by providing objective areas within which the significant history and social imagery can be reproduced. A further factor is the explicitly politicising agent of the CP in Fife, which acts both to instill radical consciousness yet which, at the same time, forms part of the significant history. Having examined these areas through which consciousness and identity are produced and reproduced, we will then turn to recent events, the 1984-85 strike and its aftermath, in order to examine both how the historical legacy and radical philosophy operate in the present, and how they both affect, and are affected by, objective circumstances.

## CHAPTER FOUR.

## OCCUPATIONAL IDENTITY: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PIT.

4.1 Introduction.

... to understand the basic structure of the social relations in a working community we have, first and foremost, to study the work itself in some detail; in other words we have to know the material culture at least moderately well.... For a man's attitude to his fellows grows, at least in part, out of the terms and conditions under which he works[1].

Although the mining industry has been the focus of many studies of the working class and, indeed, of those analysing the particular means and manifestations of class consciousness, attention has largely been directed to the levels of community and union organisation, and explanations have sought to understand the militancy of the miners in terms of such factors. Often such an orientation has been the inevitable outcome of the historical nature of such undertakings, which must inevitably encounter difficulties in unravelling the complexity of subjective understandings[2]. Few studies have, it is felt, attempted to examine, in detailed fashion, the relationship between the experiences of work in the coal industry, and consciousness and identity, and the means by which the nature of employment may form the basis for radical perspectives. The militancy of the miners, consequently, is often taken as a given; a tacit assumption that needs little reference other than to the particularistic organisational or institutional characteristics of the industry. Such factors will be examined in later chapters. The task of the present chapter is to attempt to offer some explanation as to how employment is experienced.

This is not to say that the area of work has been neglected, nor that analysis of the interrelationship between objective and subjective conditions has not been forthcoming. However, it is felt that, too often, studies have been either merely descriptive, providing an account of working practices and technology, or have



assumed a simplistic correspondence between these and ensuing types of consciousness. Such an argument has already been outlined more generally in relation to the area under discussion in Chapter One. In specific relation to the mining industry the work of Wilson is an excellent example of the purely technological approach, showing the changes within the coal industry between 1750 and 1914, whilst Campbell's research on the Scottish coal industry is a useful instance of the latter[3].

Campbell seeks to explain how changing work practices and technological developments from the 1870s resulted in three periods characterised by different forms of consciousness; the independent collier, the bureaucratic reformist and the militant miner. Campbell's work, therefore, seeks to plot subjective understandings and attitudes against changing material circumstances and, as such, attempts to provide a dynamic account over time. Yet, this contains a tendency to collapse consciousness into the mere expression of present employment conditions, which lacks an understanding of the complexity of response between and within miners, nor does it provide an explanation of how the awareness of time on the part of the actors themselves may influence their attitudes.

More subjective accounts of work experience come from autobiographical and biographical accounts. The reminiscences of ex-miners' leaders allow us a positive insight into the lives and thoughts of miners in the past and, consequently, provide useful indications of the way in which analysis may proceed. However, in addition to being largely concentrated on the lives of leaders, and thus giving little account of the mass of workers, such accounts tend to be partial, and so, whilst illuminating, must be regarded as data rather than established fact. In this way, the memoirs of men such as Robert Smillie and Abe Moffat, both Scottish miners' leaders, may be used in conjunction with more contemporary accounts such as that by Douglass to show how this experience has continued or changed over time as the mining industry has gone into decline[4]. The transitions through which



the industry has passed is thoughtfully explored by Williamson's biography of his grandfather[5]. Tracing his grandfather from the Northumberland of 1872 to that of 1965, Williamson provides a rare insight into the way the world has changed for the miner, and how this has been experienced. Such studies, therefore, may be used as the groundwork from which a more general study may commence.

One of the most best known analyses of the miners must still remain that of Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter[6]. Looking at a Yorkshire community in the 1950s, they attempt to show us, often in the miners' own words, how work was experienced, and the ways in which the generations were responding to the changes resultant upon nationalisation some few years earlier in 1947. They point to the pride miners held about their work, the bitterness still felt about the inter-war years and the ambiguity with which they regarded changes in the industry; which were viewed as having 'softened' younger men. Yet the work is largely descriptive and, as the qualitative analysis is essentially peripheral to their concerns, they do not erect an overall framework for understanding beliefs within which to locate these insights. This is not a criticism, however, for their main objective is to examine anthropologically the relationships between the areas of work, leisure and family, and thus the role of the past and the meanings which which miners invest their work and the consequences for consciousness formation are not the main aims of the task. One needs, therefore, to turn to works not specifically dealing with miners to see how the qualitative examination of class experience has been undertaken in other areas.

A useful study into the qualitative aspects of class experience is that of Sennett and Cobb[7]. Looking at Bostonian workers of immigrant extraction, whose initial experience of strong ties and the corporate identity of the ethnic group was being dispelled by a closer integration into American life, they seek to explain how the experience of 'class injury' is an 'existential problem of freedom and dignity' created socially due to the compulsion entering people's lives from the larger society[8]. Dealing with



respondents suffering from feelings of inadequacy and lack of personal dignity and self-respect, they explain these factors in terms of the underlying ideology of achievement and personal success through individual merit that is dominant in American society.

This results from the perception that power, respect and dignity derive from individual merit; that is, social worth is dependent upon individual success. Thus, ability is the key to social class. White collar and professional employment thereby provide individuals with greater feelings of self-worth and social importance than does working-class manual labour; for such accomplishments are held to depend upon personal skill and intellect, whereas there are few talents held to be required for physical graft. In this way a higher social position, 'gained' through educational success, is based on talent, and a lower class position resulting from manual labour is perceived in terms of personal failure and inadequacy.

The workers in Sennett and Cobb's study do not, however, seek social change, for the meritocratic ideal instills feelings of self-doubt which prevent the challenging of social arrangements. The societal demand for demonstrations of ability serve to make people anxious, defeated and full of self-reproach about their own lack of talent, and doubtful about personal worthiness to be accorded respect. By depriving people of a 'secure dignity' in themselves and in the eyes of others, which society achieves through portraying social position as determined by personal ability, and by defining what actions people can take to validate their dignity, workers are driven to secure material goods through individualistic striving, and by seeking educational advance for their children.

This brief outline of the main conclusions of the study seeks to show that Sennett and Cobb engage in a detailed qualitative analysis of workers' orientations and attitudes to work and class which highlight the complexity and ambiguity contained in actors'



thoughts. Yet in many ways it is markedly dissimilar to the topic under discussion. The workers they interviewed were largely un-unionised, and did not reside in close-knit occupational and communal groupings; thus increasing their vulnerability to prevailing ideologies. Nor is the work placed within a historical orientation which could uncover other forms of social worth. However, whilst very different in these respects, the study accords us useful insights to the importance of feelings of pride and dignity which can derive from the work situation, and thus crucially affect attitudes, and how collectivism may possibly act to undermine the assault from individualistic philosophies which serve to perceive a working-class position in society in terms of personal failure. Thus, the study shows the centrality of labour as the basis for attitudes and beliefs. A more rigorous theoretical framework within which to analyse the relationship between work and subjective orientations is provided within understandings of the concept of an 'occupational community'.

The work of Salaman attempts to uncover the determinants of an occupational community; in which he includes the miners. He argues that three aspects are central to the creation of this; involvement in work, marginality and the inclusiveness of work. It is the first of these factors which is related directly to the self-image of work, and which, thus, concerns us here; and which serves to highlight the differences with the conclusions of Sennett and Cobb[9].

He argues that members of occupational communities may develop an underlying pride in work, based on the danger or the skill involved, or the importance of their labour to society. This provides such workers with a sense of satisfaction, and a positive self-image, from their occupational identity. For these reasons, members value the self-image of the group. Consequently, they do not distance themselves from the work identity, but internalise an occupational value system. This is not seen as a formal description but a normative statement about a set of qualities on which to base one's life, and which one shares with the



occupational community. These values come from the shared experience of work. He argues:-

When a group of people share a valued experience it is likely that they will develop common values based on and reflecting this shared experience, and as a result of sharing these values they will come to regard their partners in the valued activity as people whose judgements and opinions are of particular importance. Men who are deeply involved in their work skills will use their occupational fellows as a reference group[10].

As such the work identity and image are not individualistic phenomena but social ones; shared by the occupational community as a whole, and carrying social ramifications. He states:-

Evidence from studies of occupational communities strongly suggests that their members see themselves in terms of their occupational membership and that this involves the internalisation of a value system. Men not only see themselves as printers or policemen or army officers, but are also able to describe the qualities and characteristics of members of these occupations. The value and belief systems which are held by members of occupational communities are frequently relevant not only to the world of work but to many other aspects of members' lives.... One of the most striking facts to emerge... is that members of these communities share viewpoints, attitudes and values with other members. Members of occupational communities use the community as a primary reference group. The incorporation of an occupational role into one's self-image is obviously directly related to the use of the occupational community as a reference group, for the values which accompany this identification will be derived from the reference group; and the other members of the reference group will be the 'significant others' whose support is so important in this respect and who are capable of exercising powerful social sanctions[11].

As such, the collective values and identity of the occupational community form a strong bonding between those who share the valued sense of work experience, who will relate to each other as friends rather than merely as workmates, and feel a sense of collectivity as distinct from others who do not share their work. Salaman thus provides us with an indication of those factors which will act to affect the development of work identity and related beliefs, and how a mutual value system may act as an implicit



ideology to which members will conform. We would expect from his analysis, therefore, that the miners will display such collective feelings and a strong work identity if they form, as he argues, an occupational community.

To conclude this section, it is believed that other works on the miners have largely failed to explicate fully the relationship between experience of work and consciousness and identity formation. Such an analysis, it is felt, can most fruitfully be undertaken within a qualitative analysis which seeks to uncover the meanings given to, and attitudes formed by the employment experience, as utilised by Sennett and Cobb, but that, in relation to the miners, this can fruitfully draw on the insights of the concept of the occupational community in order to unravel the relationship. Yet the work of Williamson and Dennis et al alerts us to the importance of placing this within an awareness of historical change in the work situation, and thus to the necessity of exploring how consciousness and identity may be effected by time. The centrality of this in a period in which mining has undergone severe change is highlighted by Douglass:-

Without that sense of continuity, work down the pit would be meaningless, so the collier insists on his connection to history all the more passionately, the more he feels the continuity threatened or his place in the tradition derided. History preserves his dignity, so the claim to history becomes a personal thing and a tone of reverence casts its spell over the parade of events, some lived and all remembered[12].

#### 4.2 The World in the Pit.

Whilst there undoubtedly have been major changes in the mining industry, as we shall see later, in fundamental ways the miners' perceptions of their work, among all age groups, display a basic continuity. The industry is not seen to have altered in significant ways, and is held, indeed, to be incapable of basic change. It would appear to be from these areas of similarity that there develops, due to the peculiar nature of the mining industry, a particularistic attitude to work over time. Further, it is this underlying orientation which provides the framework for the



development of assumptions about life which serve to inform the potentiality for radical consciousness.

The miners argue that deep-mining, no matter what technology is introduced, will always be the same. The nature of physical conditions underground serve to unify the experiences of the generations despite changing work practices. The essential nature of the pit remains a constant. Abe Moffat, ex-President of the Scottish Colliery Enginemen, Boilermen and Tradesmen's Association [SCEBTA], argues:-

Ye'll never change a pit. Ye'll never change a pit. The likes o', ye can have mechanisation, that's changed the industry, but nevertheless, when ye leave the pit bottom and gae tae the face it's still an arduous job and the dangers are still there. And mechanisation brought out other dangers tae in terms o' using heavy, heavy machinery, and the safety aspect had tae be developed tae a higher standard in the mining industry in order tae try and avoid the accidents that accrue fra' the introduction o' mechanisation.

As this quotation indicates, much of the continuity is perceived in terms of the dangers resulting from hazardous and uncomfortable geological conditions. A 49 year old redundant miner in the Labour Party recalls:-

It will never be different doon a pit, like, fur warking because ye've aye tae watch yursel doon a pit. As ah say, it's no' the safest o' places tae wark yet even though they dramatically improved safety conditions and that.

For younger men also there is an awareness that the work is different to that of other occupations and that, subsequently, miners are different, due to the particular conditions under which they labour. A 33 year old communist argues:-

Well, ye have tae remember that the likes o', say, the difference between a coal mine, well, any mine fur that ma'er, and a factory or a ship-yaird, is the factory and the ship-yairds, the conditions they're warking under are man-made. The conditions that we wark under was laid doon when the dinosaurs walked the earth.



Such working conditions require the development of particular orientations which enable the miners to perform their tasks. Toughness and 'manliness' are attributes which miners perceive themselves to require. As Williamson argues, work attitudes:-

... include a strong attachment to the idea of being 'tough', of not worrying about danger.... Then there is the value, central to their masculine self-image, of hard graft and a belief that only 'real men' are capable of it[13].

A major criterion, therefore, to being a 'good' miner is that of physical strength and hardiness. Pride in work, therefore, comes from physical attributes. A 72 year old communist recalls an incident from the 1960s which clearly indicates this belief:-

Ah think that radicalism was verra sectarian among the miners, in which they're regairding all the other warkers as bluidy pansies, ye know. Everybody else has a gurl's job, ye know. It was an expression then, "Christ, he's got a woman's job!" Ah remember a big, 6 feet man, he's just retired, he warked at Seafield in the Time Office, and a miner said tae me, "A man's no' a man that size daeing a gurl's job." Because he was a clerical warker. Ye see, ah think that sectarianism, and that kindae, no' quite open contempt but, ah'm searching fur a be'er explanation, [there was] this a'itude that people who didnae wark doon the pit were having an easier life compared tae the miners, ye know.

The skills that such work calls forth reflect the harshness of the conditions in which the miners are employed. Often such skills are summed up in the term 'pit-sense' which describes all the various attributes necessitated by life underground. The need, mentioned earlier, to be alert to the safety aspect at all times means that miners require a constant attentiveness to their surroundings. A redundant man in his 40s argues:-

If ye dinnae pick-up pit-sense it's a verra dangerous sortae place tae be, doon a pit. Because if ye didnae have pit-sense ye were in a really bad position because o' aye the things aboot ye. There was moving machinery, there was a bad roof, ken. It was just, ye didnae gae aboot, consciously gae aboot thinking aboot aye the various [dangers], but there was just something there ye had tae be verra careful o'. It's no' just like crossing a road or that. Ye had tae be verra [carefull], and it just came na'ural, ken.



If 'pit-sense' is an implicit attribute, an unconscious awareness of whether a post-roof is about to break, whether the pavement is safe or whatever, miners take pride also in the mental attributes of their work. Thus, they do not regard their job as 'merely' manual, despite its accent on strength and physical expertise, but also stress the need for versatility and the ability to make independent judgements in a workplace wherein workers are often outwith supervisory control. These characteristics also enable miners to develop feelings of positive self-worth. A 49 year old redundant Labour Party member states:-

Ye ken, a man has got a wee bit o' pride, ye ken, and ah'm proud that ah was a miner, ken. Ah've got tae say that because ah was proud that ah was a miner.... Och, ah couldnae ha' warked in a factory, ken. Naw, ah think that once ye became a miner that was it, ye were a miner, ken. Ah cannae put wards tae it, but there was just something aboot being a miner. And fur all the danger, and fur that ah've come through in ma time. Ah had a big back operation through being a miner. Ah've seen men ge'ing killed at the coalface, ken. But ah've come through an awfy lot o' happy times tae, ken. And kenning alot o' men. Ye wouldnae meet men like that in a factory, ken, because miners was mair independent. Miners have tae be. Miners, ah firmly believe, that miners ha' tae be adaptable tae si'uations. It wasnae like an assembly line job. Miners had tae adapt. Bad roof conditions, bad warking conditions, miners will adapt. They will use a bit o' wood fur onything. They were awfy versatile. Factory warkers willnae be versatile the same. They're stonding there and they're daeing the same job, repetition. Miners dinnae dae that.

Thus, pride in work comes from a combination of both physical and mental attributes called forth by the particular exigencies of their employment. Yet this is portrayed as creating qualitative differences between miners and non-miners as well as occupational ones. The evidence indicates that the miners' identity depends upon two criteria. Firstly, a sense of the separateness of their industry serves to define their self-image and differentiate them from the wider society. Secondly, objective conditions underground call forth certain outlooks and attitudes, and necessitate a particular form of social relations which build upon this, to act as an underlying mechanism upon which their cultural and political identity and beliefs are formed. These relations



shape their personal, inter-personal and social attitudes in a way which further differentiates them from other workers and act as a buffer against individualistic ideologies and as a fertile ground for collectivistic beliefs and practices.

Miners of all age groups and political persuasions expressed beliefs, like that shown earlier, that to work underground one must have the ability to endure the particular physical conditions and develop skills to protect oneself against danger. Such characteristics are believed not to be possessed by the majority of individuals. A communist in his 50s from CCW argues:-

Ah mean, hoo many times have ye heard people say, "Ah wouldnae wark doon a pit fur £500 a week?" And why? Because it's horrible! And here are people who spend their lives daeing that, producing coal, and dae something yoo wouldnae dae. These are rock-haird individuals who are daeing that kindae job.

A young politically-unaligned miner in his early 20s indicates the consequences of this perception:-

What ah think is great [aboot] being a miner is ye're different. Ye're different fra' everybody else. And the way ye're different is the way ye wark, and the conditions ye wark under, ye know.

It is from statements such as these that we can begin to perceive what underlies the frequent assertion that miners are a "breed apairt," and that they are doing "a job that only they can dae, and only they will be able tae dae." That is, there is a belief that it is only a particular person who is capable of dealing with the actualities of mining. Miners, therefore, tend, in a sense, to see themselves as an elite. For many, particularly older men, this is tied to a belief that a man can only 'really' be a miner if he comes from a mining family. Those who come from outwith the industry are not 'truly' miners. Underneath this belief can be perceived to lie assumptions that coming from a mining background facilitates what Williamson calls 'pit hardening'; that is, that skills are not regarded merely as resulting from occupational experiences but also from knowledge acquired through informal



socialisation processes both within the pit and the wider community. The same communist from CCW argues:-

... they are warking in conditions that ye almost had tae be bred tae. Ah don't know hoo many people... came fra' ootside and went intae the mining industry. There werenae so verra many. There were a number came in during the war wi' the Bevin Boy thing where people were conscripted tae gae and wark in the mines. But most miners come fra' a mining femily, and ye're kindae bred tae gae doon a pit. It's no' a na'ural environment fur somebody coming fra' ootside, who's foreign tae it. But if ye've been brought up in a mining village, in that kindae atmosphere, then ye are being bred tae wark doon the pit. Because it's a special kindae person coming fra' a special kindae communi'y who gaes and warks doon a pit, because nobody would want tae gae and dae that by choice.

All those from mining families stated that as children they were in an environment wherein mining was discussed and that, as such, they were being in some way prepared for the pits, this being necessitated by a lack of alternative employment within the region as the last quotation indicates. Although all age groups argued along similar lines, this is most strongly summed-up by a 72 year old communist who describes his childhood back in the 1910s and 1920s:-

Looking back noo ah'm horrified at the childhood that we had. We had nae real childhood, no' that ah can think aboot. Ah think, in some misguided way, the men realised that oor life was gaeing tae be haird, and we were trained tae be haird. The men would make ye fight one another. Ah can remember one terrible incident, and ma conscience bothers me aboot it noo, when they took me, and we wore these short troosers, and the lamp-post was only aboot 9 foot high, and they stuck me on the lamp-post wi' the arm o' the lamp-post up the leg o' ma troosers, and kept slapping ma face and so forth till ah got angry. And then, when ah came doon, [one man] says, "See him? He's laughing at yoo, \_\_\_\_." So ah went over and banged the other fella. That's the kindae training we got. And when ah look back at the games we played, they were horrifying. We were playing games in which the one was the "hero" who could suffer the most pain withoot crying. Ah learned, later on, this was hoo the Nazis had trained their storm-troopers, but that's hoo we got trained.

This aspect of socialisation will be discussed further later on in relation to identity reproduction, for now, however, what it appears to indicate is that miners appear to perceive themselves



as separate and different from other workers and thus prepared for their employment. Mining is, therefore, not merely 'doing a job', a matter of acquiring certain occupational skills, but is crucially tied up with a social status; that is, 'being a miner' entails a role outwith the merely industrial. This can further be seen in relation to the particularistic orientations to work, and each other, to be found among miners.

As we have seen, miners perceive the qualities of physical strength, independence and self-reliance to be crucial prerequisites to being a 'good' miner. However, the importance of these skills at work to extract the coals carries social ramifications also. The following statement from Mick McGahey expresses well how the nature of employment affects the miners' mentality whilst also highlighting the collectivistic consequences of the industrial situation:-

Well, o' course, the point about it is one must recognise the nature o' the industry. The miners have a discipline, the miners have a comradeship. They can be disputing on a saturday night wi' one another over a game o' dominoes but, cer'ainly, when they gae doon that pit on a monday, they're uni'ed. Because they know and recognise they're in a struggle wi' Mother Nature, and she doesnae give up her treasures verra kindly. And in the struggle wi' Mother Nature they're **dependent** on one another, and, therefore, they wark harmoniously and closely wi' one another underground, and it develops a comradeship and a uni'y, so that the slogan o' "An Injury tae One is an Injury tae All" really operates, and they feel bound together.

This statement indicates that skill and pride in work are not individualistic in nature, for the necessity of mutual aid engendered by the potential dangers of the pit means a miner's skills, or lack of them, can be either life-saving or life-costing qualities. As such, physical skill is a social phenomenon due to the repercussions a miner's skill might have. This awareness can be found among both old and young miners. A 33 year old communist expresses both the ever-present potentiality of danger and the necessity of mutuality:-

... ye often hear the miners talk about the comradeship between the miners, and it's true. It's a fact. Warking in



the pits ye can feel it. Because ah wark as pairt o' a team, there's two o' us, and it's never spoken aboot, ye never mention it, but ah know, and ma neighbour knows, if onything gaes wrang, it's me and him.

It is, in many ways, hard to separate out in miners' comments the need for careful attentiveness and good work down the pit from the more emotive side of the ensuing relationship of those brought together in such working conditions. A 72 year old communist argues in a similar vein:-

Ye see, they all know when they gae doon that pit their lives are depending upon each other. And miners are no' only physically naked doon a pit, they're mentally naked as well. Ye're revealed tae yur fellow warker. And the hairdships ye have tae face. The cut honds ye get, the difficulties. Men get trapped. Hoo quickly ye rush, and hoo efficiently ye rush tae help, and so forth. Somebody's sick, and yur contribution tae the Sick Fund tae help him in his troubles at Christmas or whatever it is, is all carefully noted. And the result is ye get a welding together, and a caring fur each other. And ah've ayeways been proud o' being a miner, and pairt o' that elite group o' men who really care fur each other.

As well as being found in all age groups, similar sentiments can be found among miners of differing political alignment. All refer to the necessity of standing by their fellows. The following two statements come from a Labour Party member and an unaligned miner respectively, both in their 30s:-

There's a terrific atmosphere doon the pit when ye're warking wi' people, and once ye've warked wi' them fur 2 or 3 days, or even weeks, ye sortae build-up a relationship, or a bond, between yur neighbours, yur friends, yur comrades. When ye're warking together ye're depending on each other, fur safety etc.. Yur life's in each other's honds, and ye form a bond, and ye never lose that bond. It's aye there.

They're still as militant noo as what they were before, ah would say. Miners have ayeways been militant because o' the type o' wark they dae. And they've ayeways stuck together. A miner will ayeways help a miner oot.

It is in this way that we can see that the fulfilling of industrial responsibilities is accompanied by social responsibilities that are witnessed by the collectivity. It is the two combined that make up the mining identity. Being a miner,



therefore, is not merely an occupational description of work, but a statement which conveys an idea of the social being also. The social and work identity interact to blur distinctions between an industrial and social status. However, it is the social side which appears to compensate for the negative aspects of the work conditions; that is, that whilst all miners will state that their work conditions are bad, they still confess to pride in being a miner as a social status.

It is a combination of both the occupational and social elements of the miners' identity which provide the framework within which lies the potentiality for radical politicisation. As we have already seen from Mick McGahey, mining may be perceived in many ways as a inherently being a struggle with adverse objective conditions. This has crucial consequences for possible political expression. A 54 year old communist argues:-

O' course, ye're warking against the elements in mining, and mining breeds militant men, militant warkers, because o' its na'ure. Ye have tae be militant because the elements are militant in turn. Therefore, ye have tae have a militant na'ure tae survive and tae produce doon the pits. So ah think it was that high concentration o' the pits [in Fife] that bred that militancy, which was almost fertile ground for the injection o' socialism.

Yet this perception is not purely to be found among older politically-active men, but also among younger miners. A non-aligned 24 year old echoes the above statement:-

People dinnae understond, ye see, as lang as there's pits, right, there'll ayeways be militancy tae a cer'ain degree. It doesnae ma'er hoo much o' a super-pit ye get, or [if] ye put sofas in the cage on the way doon or whatever ye dae, because o' the type o' wark ye dae. The people are different.

Consequently, it would appear that the nature of the work and the social relations in the pit both reinforce each other in laying the ground for the development of radical consciousness. It is due to the harshness of conditions and the communal prerequisites of ensuring safety in such conditions means the miners interviewed emphasised the necessity of mutuality in collectivistic struggle



at work, and, correspondingly, showed a mistrust towards individualism and self-orientation as potentially endangering the group. Mutual imperatives demand collective responsibility. This issue is clearly expressed by a retired 61 year old who is a member of the Labour Party:-

... these sortae built-in safeguards dae instill in us a sense o' responsibility tae one another, ye know. In other wards, when we gae doon that pit each and every one o' us have a bond tae one another, ye know. We're interdependent upon one another. So, therefore, we've got tae see that every one o' us act accordingly. Ah mean, ye couldnae have somebody who was contrary tae the rule who warks in the mining industry because everybody's safety depends on everybody else. So, therefore, when ye gae doon the pit, and when ye gae tae yur wark, nae ma'er what job ye're daeing, ye're *ayeways* thinking about the boy that's warking next tae ye, tae see that he daesnae get hurt, and the boy above him daesnae get hurt, and that ye dae things that are built-in tae safeguard one another. So, therefore, ye instill a responsibility in everyone.

It is in this sense that it can be argued that mining provides what may be called an 'immanent socialism'; that is, that the emphasis on mutuality and collectivism, and sanctions against individualism, lay the framework upon which may be developed a radical consciousness through the articulation of a coherent politicised world view capable of drawing these elements within a wider explanation of society as a whole. This is expressed by a local Communist Party leader in his 50s:-

Ah think the militancy stairts wi' it being industrial. The politics comes intae it when ye're stairting tae analyse, "Why is it ah live in the conditions ah live in?" They look fur answers. But ah think the militancy arises fra' the pure way they have tae hack the coal fra' the earth. The conditions that they wark in and the haird toil and so on. [Fra'] that stems a rebellion in them, that "Why am ah having tae wark here in these conditions?" ye know.

The potentiality for crystallising these thoughts into a political framework is discussed in Chapter Seven. For the moment what requires discussion is whether, and if so, how, changes within the industry have crucially affected this continuity of experience in ways not yet uncovered, and the consequences of this for younger



generations. Additionally, we must examine how miners acquire the more social aspects to their occupational identity and whether this is uniformly internalised.

#### 4.3 Industrial Change.

Whilst the previous section has explored the fundamental continuities miners perceive within their work environment this must not be allowed to overshadow the very real changes within the industry. The increasing sophistication of machinery, changing work practices with the ending of the contracting system and better safety conditions have greatly altered the experience of work within the pits in the years since nationalisation, while increased affluence has enabled them to take their place in the wider society. Rather than extensively detail these changes, attention shall be focused more on the meaning they have for miners. What must be discovered is the consequence of these changes, and how knowledge of this past effects younger men.

All miners over 40 years of age agreed that increasing mechanisation was the singularly most important, and beneficial, change that they had witnessed. This has obviously removed much of the "haired graft" which older generations had to endure. Rather than depending on a density of manual labour, therefore, mining has become, in many ways, an engineering industry. A man in his 50s argues:-

The most important changes have been technological change, the advances in the technology o' producing coal, which obviously has its spin-off tae hoo that affects people. Ah mean, the number o' people employed in the industry noo is verra much less than it's previously been, because ye need less people tae produce coal wi' the kindae equipment they're noo using. So mining has changed fram a labour intensive kindae industry tae mair and mair a reliance on sophisticated mining machinery.

Yet there is an agreement between the age groups that although the physical skills of hand-stripping have now almost totally disappeared, this does not mean that the industry has become



deskilled but that, rather, they have been replaced with the new skills demanded of the technological era. Consequently there has been an increase in craftsmen in the pits, such as electricians and engineers. Mick McGahey makes a direct comparison between the age groups:-

Ah drove a pit-pony doon the pit. Noo, there's nae such things as pit ponies. Picks and shovels have gone oot. Ye're noo dealing wi' possibly the most technologically-advanced mining industry in the world. And these young miners are nae langer the pick and shovel men. They're skilled mining engineers, handling verra sophisticated machinery.

However, whilst the miners interviewed accepted that the physical labour was less intensive, many, especially the younger men, argue that mechanisation has brought with it new problems; for example, the dangers of working with electricity in wet conditions, the noise and stour from machinery, and the dangers that fast-moving equipment in confined spaces bring. As we saw in the last section Abe Moffat, ex-President of SCEBTA, the craftsmen's union, argued that safety regulations had to be developed to a higher standard to deal with these issues. In is in this sense that younger men assert their own skills in comparison to those of conventional mining. A 30 year old communist argues:-

Yur warking experience is different. Yur actual warking operation is different. There's much mair demanded fra' ye. See, ye hear ald miners say, "Ach, when ah warked in the mines it was really haird" and all that. Some o' them wouldnae last twenty minutes wi' a modernised, ken, mechanised face.

Some would argue, indeed, that change has led to more skill being demanded from the younger generation. A 37 year old member of the Labour Party states:-

Well, ah think we consider oorsels mair skilled than we used tae be. Which ye are. Ah mean, ye've got tae be a bit mair skilled noo tae wark underground than ye used tae be. Ah mean, the day o' pick and shovel's past. There's mair technology aboot it.... Ken, it's no' onybody that can gae and wark on a face, like. At one time ye just threw **onybody** on a face, ken, a 14 year ald. Just gi' him a pick and shovel and say, "Follow that man and strip his groond wi' him." It's no' like that noo. Ah mean, it's technical.



Yet whilst, on an occupational level, the miners may not claim that their industry has seen an increasing deskilling affecting their stature as workmen, but instead that there would appear to have been an industrial disjuncture around which a new skill structure has developed, the miners believe that these changes have altered the nature of the men in the pits in significant ways which cause concern for many men of all age-groups. As Dennis et al discovered in Yorkshire in the 1950s, technological change is regarded by the older men as having lessened the requirements for hardness in certain ways. They state:-

... older men see the changes [in actual work conditions] as productive of different types of men in the coming generation of miners. Pressed, they will say that mining is fundamentally a rotten job and always will be and miners will always be the same, but they hold strongly to the view that because of the changed industrial and social conditions, the younger miners are in some way 'softer' than they were[14].

This attitude can also be found to be in evidence among the Fife miners. Young miners often make reference to the undercurrent found among older men that the young are less 'hardy'. Although this does not necessarily mean that they are denigrating the young, it indicates that they view the new industry as less demanding. A miner in his 30s states:-

When ye're warking in the pits and that, and ye're maybe warking haird, or ye think ye're warking haird, and the sweat's blinding ye, and an alder boy [will come along] and, "Yoo. Ah wouldnae like tae see yoo in the hond-stripping. Ye'd be nae guid." But they dinnae say it insulting, like. It's a joking. Ye know, they're no' trying tae take the mickey. It's just a game. It's just the pa'er that ye have in the pits.

However, alongside what may be perceived as generational differences caused by changing work practices Dennis et al argue that there is also an assumption that the younger miners are different socially and politically as well. As time distances younger men from the period of hardship under private ownership, older men view the former as lacking an awareness and understanding of that past, the struggles that these called forth



to fight for changes, and the need for this to be ever fought to sustain improvements. They argue:-

The older workers do certainly feel that the younger men take their improved standards too much for granted so that they may tend to neglect the organisational and political necessities bound up with those improvements.... The younger miners have stepped into a situation made more pleasant by the struggles and bitter hardships of their predecessors - and they seem hardly to be grateful. This is how the picture is seen by the older miners[15].

This statement presents us with two issues. Firstly, whether the Fife miners regard the young as lacking in historical awareness of previous hardship and, secondly, if there is such a lack of knowledge, whether it is a uniform attribute among the young, or only to be found among certain sections. In relation to the first question, only fourteen respondents stated that they thought the young were largely unaware of their past - of whom 3 were communists, 5 were Labour Party members and 6 were politically unaligned. Thus only 35% of miners interviewed would themselves appear to support Dennis et al's assertion that the young do not know about their past. Further, the ratios here would indicate that communists are more likely to regard the young as historically-aware than other types of respondent.

As we saw in the last chapter this aspect was regarded as an important ingredient to political involvement; that is, that history plays an important part in laying the basis for, and developing, political ideas among successive generations. This may be supported by the last quotation in the sense that the seeming lack of gratitude of the young may be tied to a lack of knowledge of the past against which to measure their comparatively pleasant circumstances. Thus, it may be that Fife's reputation as a politically radical area may be crucially tied to a greater historical awareness in that its ability to perpetuate the historical legacy is a mechanism for reproducing radical consciousness. As such, we need to discover whether all younger miners have this historical knowledge in regard to work or not, for the premise must be that one would expect to find greater



evidence of an historical legacy among the most politically-articulate miners.

#### 4.4 The Young Ones.

As has already been seen in a previous chapter, all the miners interviewed can, in a sense, be regarded as 'radical' in that at a basic level they all supported the 1984-85 strike in its entirety and all voted Labour. In this way they are all to be seen as distinct from, say, the Nottinghamshire miners. Further, all the men were supporters of their Unions, if not necessarily actively involved, and all stated that they would strike again to protect it, although some qualified this by saying that this would depend on 'favourable' circumstances and/or a ballot. However, there are degrees of difference to be discerned among the miners in relation to their awareness of their mining past and their feelings about this; that is, whilst all displayed a basic knowledge of the harsher conditions of the past, the depth of this knowledge, and the attitudes it provoked, differed.

The belief is held, among old and young men, that industrial and social change has led to a decline in the presence of a mining identity among the miners; that is, that awareness of a particularistic identity is in less evidence than formerly among those employed in the mining industry. As we have seen, despite technological change in the pits, miners still regard the job as fundamentally unchanged in key aspects. Thus, whilst physical labour may have lessened, modernisation cannot be held primarily responsible for new orientations. Rather, much of this is perceived as connected to the increased affluence the miners have enjoyed since World War Two in comparison to their former experience. The results are held to be a growing materialism, and with it a greater individualism, than previously. Such orientations are held in a negative light in that the new prosperity is seen as making the men softer, and less collectivistic in outlook. This first attitude is expressed by a



49 year old Labour Party member:-

... when ah see the young men noo, ah mean they're all running about in big cars, sports cars, and that. And, noo, in all honesty, ah can mind when ah staired in the pit that ah had tae gae and get 2 or 3 windaes tae clean in the aifternoon coming aff the early shift, aifter ah got ma dinner, tae gi' me money tae gae tae the pictures. Ah didnae e'en ha' a pushbike, ye ken. It's a be'er standard o' living these days, ye ken.

In relation to the second assumption, the belief in declining mutuality can be seen with regard to the contempt held for those who accept redundancy; 'The Big Penny'. Such men are seen as selling their jobs away, and thus those of the community at large, rather than staying in the industry to fight for its future. This mistrust of those who are materially orientated is a comparatively new phenomenon, for prior to nationalisation the miners were not in a position to aspire to material possessions. Thus, whilst the new-found relative prosperity is welcomed, there is an ambivalence held in that it appears at least partially responsible for the decline in mutuality the miners perceive among their ranks, for this recently acquired concern for materialism is seen as linked to an instrumentalist orientation to the job itself. As one 37 year old member of the Labour Party argues:-

... aifter nationalisation they needed all the coal they could get. The country needed everything it could get. That's hoo they got nationalisation through so easy and everything. Ah mean, it was supposed tae belang tae the men and they made bread. And, tae me, that's what ah've ayeways said, ye've got tae many young guys in the pits noo that are in it fur what they can get ootae it. Ah mean, we could all at one time ha' left and went tae the oil-rigs and made hundreds o' pounds a week and things like that, ye ken, but no' all o' us wanted tae. As ah say, ah like warking in the pits. Ah still like warking in the pits. Ah want tae finish ma day in the pits because ah like the job, ah like the communi'y. But there's tae many people who've got mortgages, motor cars, videos, colour tellies and that's all they're bothered about. It's "Man, Mind Thyself". They've nae thought tae their fellow men at all, and ah think that's where it all falls doon.

This quotation indicates two things. Firstly, once again we can see an implicit assumption that miners have a dual identity, as 'workers with coal' and as 'miners as a social status', and that



miners should regard their jobs as something other than merely a wage-pocket and, secondly, that materialistic orientations cultivated by relative prosperity are held responsible for the believed undermining of collective ideals, which implies that the social status is also a political one. A belief in the socio-political ramifications of the status would be most likely to be found among those with radical consciousness; for it is such men who uphold these connotations to their identity. If there is any basis to this argument, one would expect that politically-unaligned men would be much more likely, therefore, to see miners as different to non-miners only in relation to work conditions, but not as constituting different people. That is, they may accept their difference as workers in particular conditions, but not acknowledge the status difference. This can be seen in the following quotation from a 39 year old first-generation Fifer from a non-mining family:-

The only difference is the conditions that ye're warking in. There's a big difference tae warking in a factory than warking doon a pit; i.e., doon a pit, once ye're doon a pit, that's yoo. Ye're doon it. Ye're doon a big hole in the groond and ye've nae daylight, nae sunshine or onything. It's just conditions, that's all really. Ah wouldnae say it makes [miners] that different. They're there fur, the end reason is tae produce a product. Noo, when ah warked in the factory ma end reason was tae produce computers. Noo, ah'm warking in an industry that produces coal.

Whilst, in accordance with the arguments of an earlier section, mining may lay the foundation for the development of a radical world view, this would appear to be founded upon the acceptance of both aspects of the mining identity; that is, the industrial identity derived from work underground and the socio-political identity formed in relation to the mutualistic relationships called forth by this work. This division away from the total, dual identity among non-radicals can be seen to be supported by the following quotation by a 24 year old electrician from a non-mining Fife family who confessed to having no interest in politics:-

Tae me, right, tae me, as a miner, it's just a job, right. If ah'm daeing a job and ge'ing paid fur it, that's it.



Yet there is a seeming contradiction here, for at the same time as manifesting a instrumentalist orientation to his work, this young miner, as with other non-aligned men of the same views, still regarded Fife as a radical area because of its mining past and expressed collectivistic attitudes also. He also argued when asked to summarise the history of the Fife miners:-

The history? Militant. That's summarised!... Just o' the fact o' one thing, it's mining past. Warking in it, and all that.... Ah would say [it's because o'] alot o' the alder miners and things like that, possibly. That's what's builds up militancy and things like that, ken. Because ye see ald guys and ye talk tae them and all the rest o' it, and they gae on aboot their views, and tell ye aboot their haird times in the pits. And ye tell them aboot the pits, and all the rest o' it. But ah'd say Fife's ayeways been a, ken, as far as Unions gae and the pits, it's ayeways been a stranghald. Ma ootlook, ah dinnae think ye'd get ony, ony young boy, right, who's in the village where ah live, that would ever cross a picket line or onything like that. Because they just wouldnae, like. And ah would say it's born and bred in them. Right, ye come fra' there and, ah would say it's sortae pride as well. Ye say, "There's nae scabs in oor village," and, "There's naebody [like that] there."

It can be seen that there is a greater complexity in this issue than may initially be supposed. Many miners complained that younger men did not know, or care, about the past, nor, indeed, about the industry in the present. Yet no young unaligned miners confirmed this view unambiguously in their comments. This is supported by a politically-unaligned 24 year old whose father had come through to the Fife pits as a non-miner. This respondent had entered the pits to learn a trade and was seeking to leave the industry at the time of interview. He expressed two comments, one about Fife's past, the other about the Union:-

Ah think there's alot mair history in Fife as regairds mining. Ah think it's quite deep-rooted.

Ah mean, ah would stond up fur ma rights and gae wi' the majori'y, obviously. But ah wouldnae say ah was a radical [though ah would stond wi' them]. Well, ah mean, if ye're in a Union and they have a vote then surely, okay, ye've got yur chance tae put yur view forrad. But it's either, if ye gae on yursel, then ye're on yursel. Ye've got tae stond united tae get onything done.



These quotations are interesting in that they appear to highlight that whilst both displayed instrumental attitudes about their work, and can, in this sense, be seen to manifest 'individualistic' orientations, with regards to their community and union they expressed solidaristic sentiments. Thus, although they view being a miner as being a wage earner without status identity they affirm key characteristics of that identity. They would consequently appear to differ only in not appearing to have an explicitly politicised world view, in the sense that mutualistic expressions are not offered in an overtly political way. This would indicate that the complaints of other miners centre around a perceived non-adherence to the coherent mining identity and consciousness. Tied to this is the assumption that such men lack commitment to the industry's future, for as was argued in an earlier quotation they are held to act individually rather than with the collective future in mind. This would appear to be borne out by a statement from a communist in his late 20s, who criticises young miners for a lack of temporal vision:-

Ah think there's still that cer'ain pride within oor generation tae be a miner which has been passed doon. But they don't see theirsels struggling on tae maintain the sortae existence, and tae pass on tae fu'ure generations like hoo oor forefeythers did. Ah don't think they see that. Ah think that all they see noo is that if they can maintain theirsels within a job, within the industry, that will dae them. They're no' thinking tae building the fu'ure o' oor industry.

The above quotations thereby serve to show us two main things. Firstly, that whilst industrial and social change may have been responsible for a changing attitude among younger generations this is more complex than may superficially appear, in that the consequences of a changing industry may be mitigated by the enabling mechanisms of radical consciousness present in community and union. Secondly, and perhaps more strikingly, the unaligned miners quoted above were not from mining families, only one had a first-generation miner as a father, and only one was from an established Fife background, the others' father coming from Glasgow. The ability of community and union to instill identity



will be discussed in the next two chapters, but for the moment one needs to demonstrate how a more detailed knowledge of past conditions may affect the younger generation miners who can draw more fully on the historical legacy.

As we have seen in the last chapter the miners interviewed acknowledged the importance of historical transmission in radical consciousness. However, for many miners, the apparent lack of adherence to the 'complete' identity found among many younger men can be traced to the rundown of the pits and the tendency of older men to leave the pits earlier. This removes a crucial channel for the instilling of the collective identity through knowledge of the past. A 30 year old communist argues:-

Ah don't think alot o' miners know what it was aboot before nationalisation. The mining industry is the youngest industry, talking o' the age o' the warkers, in Britain. The average age is something like 34 noo. So they have to rely on what people tell them and verra few people, where ah wark, come fra' a mining backgroond.

This quotation would appear to indicate that the workplace is no longer such a potent channel for the transmission of a mining history due to the composition of the workforce. With redundancy being offered to men over the age of 50, knowledge of the hardships of the inter-war years is obviously harder to gain in the pits themselves, which would clearly affect those miners without a mining background more. A Union official in his 40s expresses the predicament:-

See, we try tae tell the young men tae come tae oor mee'ings and everything, ken oor Union mee'ings. And there's some o' them quite interested, and ah would say they're the ones that's come up in mining families, like. And the other ones, one o' they YTS, they just look at ye, ye know.

But further, the removal of older men means such miners have less opportunity to develop the inter-generational relationships that historically developed down the pits, and from which experience, as well as knowledge, could grow. One Labour Party man in his



late 40s remembers what it was like for his generation:-

... if ah can mind back tae when ah was a loddie, ye ken, there was an a'itude between me and the alder men at that time. But ah found oot that in the pit, ah've aye says, ye could place yur life in the honds o' the man next tae ye, because ye kent ye had tae. But ye didnae consciously **think** aboot that, that ye kent ye could rely on him, ken, the likes o' the younger man tae the alder miner. Because **he** had the experience, and ye needed that in alot o' the bad places where we warked, ye know.

This situation is clearly different for younger men brought up in mining families, and among whom a knowledge of the harder physical graft of hand-stripping engenders a respect for previous occupational hardship. A Labour Party member from a mining family in his 30s reflects on the differences between past and present:-

Ah often hear the alder men talking aboot when they warked here or they warked there. The famous mines, the Emily. O'er here it's the Nellie. The Nellie. Ma feyther warked in the Nellie, ken. And these boys used tae cairry their ain graith. And they had maybe 5, 6 different types o' picks fur different cuts o' coal, different metals. Ye warked the coal yursel, and they **conquered** the coal. They got it doon and they done the lot. And ah thought, "Christ, that could never be done!" Ye'll hear telling ye aboot hoo much they had tae strip, and away doon there wi' their big shovels. And they say their stint, maybe 20 yairds lang and 5 feet high, and they had tae take a cut aff it. Christ, ah couldnae shovel that, ken, so hoo could these ald boys there? And some o' them, ah'm saying 5 feet high but we're warking in coal that's only aboot 3 feet and these ald boys warked in coal that's less than that, on their **bellies**. Ye know, the tales ah've heard fra' the alder boys, and they're on their sides wi' their picks, picking away. Ah mean, hoo the hell did they manage it, ken?

Whilst, as the miners say, more coal is dug in the clubs than ever came out of the pits, there is still a fundamental respect for the harsher conditions of the past. That being said, if knowledge of this comes through stories from older men who are now out of the pits, in concrete terms then, most obviously, an important channel for transmission must come through the lived familial experience which acts to enlighten the young about the dangers of the pits. Knowledge of the hardships endured by previous generations, not necessarily the experiencing of such conditions, can thus encourage, through a comparison to their own more advantaged



situation, a sense of a shared mining identity and the determination to fight on; whether this is to gain further benefits or to prevent the erosion of those won by their forebears. One unaligned activist in his late 40s, from a Fife mining family, argues:-

They've maybe seen the struggle that maybe their feythers, or their grandfeythers, ken, [went through]. Well, ah've seen ma ain feyther, the way he ended up, ken. All the bones in his body smashed and in the end o' the day nothing, **nothing** tae show fur it. It makes ye want tae fight. That's hoo it made ~~me~~ feel at the time anyway. When ah seen hoo that ald boys, ken, the ald miners were treated. It used tae appal me when ah used tae see ma feyther coming hame fra' his wark, ye ken. That was in the days before the pit-heid baths. And ye used tae ha' tae stond and wash his back, ye ken. And it was a ~~shame~~ fur them, ye ken. Ah used tae feel sorry fur them, ken, the alder men. And when ye think o' it noo, like, it was a disgrace that things like that [could happen]. Ah think, well, the miners, they deserved [mair], ken. They were gaeing doon intae the bowels o' the earth and they were coming up and they had **nothing**.

By comparison, the younger men fully appreciate that they have an easier life at the pits in many ways, but if this acts to provide them with a militant stance through example, it also can act as a means through which to gauge their potential future. This manifestation of the past/present/future configuration in consciousness is well summed up by a Labour Party member in his late 30s whose father was in the ILP:-

[Ma feyther] was a bi'er, bi'er man, like. Well, he found that he'd spent, what, fra' when he was 14 till he was 65, all that time in the pit, except fur 5 years on the surface. His last 5 years had been on the surface because he had silicosis. All that time doon the pit and tae walk oot wi' £200, £250. Bits o' fingers missing, scars all over the place and, the conditions just made ye bi'er. He had **nothing** tae show fur his life in the pit. Absolutely nothing at all. Ah think ah've got mair tae show. Aye. Ah mean, ah've got a be'er life ootae the industry than ma feyther could ever hoped tae ha' had.... Ah think ah'm verra militant, and ah think it's because o' ma fether. Ah think it's because o' ma upbringing. Just the experiences he went through and related tae me, has made me aware o' what the Coal Board are like, and what private industry would be like if we were ever privatised again. And ah can see the parallels noo. Ah can see the likes o' this Castlebriggs mine along here is ripe fur



privatisation. And ah can see us gaeing back tae the days where ye have tae take yur hat aff and say, "Hello, Sir."

Within this awareness, as we saw in the last chapter, there is a sense of duty; that is, that the current generation must be prepared to do as much as their forebears did for the conditions of the collectivity. In this sense the past, as well as being a pool from which to draw knowledge about the past, also provides a sense of companionship through identity; a sense of understanding of the lives and feelings of past generation acts to instill feelings of continuity and belonging. As one young non-aligned activist from a mining family expresses simply:-

Well, hopefully ah am [like ma grandfeyther]. Well, ma grandfeyther was in the pit. He was in the pit all his days. And everything he spoke aboot was the pits, aboot his fellow warkers and what their problems were in the pits. And that's what ah sortae intend tae cairry oot.

This identity with the past is based on a fundamental continuity of successive generations. Such young men can identify with a past which, although different in terms of technology, has enough correspondence with the conditions they experience underground at the present to be meaningful in the sense that they can enter into, albeit in imagination, experiences of the past. It is in this sense that one can argue that whilst the experience of work in the pits is based most obviously in the present, for miners the work experience is also an historical experience.

#### 4.5 Conclusion.

This chapter has sought to examine how the potentiality for radical consciousness among the Fife miners is based within the nature of employment underground. This foundation exists due to the physical nature of the task which calls forth the development of a particularistic set of social relationships based on struggle and mutuality. This ties the miners into a collective identity, which is both industrial and socio-political, that has continued over time due to the basic enduring physical conditions of the pits.



This continuity enables the mining identity to be perpetuated over time, in the sense of a fundamental continuity of experience, but is also a mechanism whereby successive generations can locate themselves within the broader identity of the collectivity. As we have seen, it is among those most firmly rooted within the historical circumstances of the mining industry within Fife that this identity and historical awareness is strongest. It is the interrelationship between contemporary work experience and familial history which enables this. It allows the miners to articulate their work experience historically, drawing upon the stories of the past to also make sense of the present. Younger miners are aware of their collective past and draw upon it to explain themselves and their world.

Further, the sense of history displayed is a particularistic one. The quotations indicate that the history of work is a significant history, one which perpetuates stories of the danger, hardship and solidarity of the Fife miners. In this sense, it acts as a mechanism to make a particularistic sense of the miners' world. It provides the framework for a political understanding of society. It is this factor which allows us to understand the nature of the relationship between work, history and radical consciousness. Whilst contemporary work experience presents certain conditions which must be dealt with and understood, and which necessitates the development of characteristics outlined above, this is only a potentiality for political development. It is the ability to make sense of the present, and articulate ideas in terms of a significant history which provides the means to develop a radical sense of self and world view; that is, present experience is rendered coherent by locating it within a view of the past which legitimates the impressions of the present.

Yet this sense of the past is also the result of contemporary experience, for if a particularistic sense of the past is drawn upon, it is because of its relevance to the present. Past and present are mutually reinforcing. This, therefore, is the clearest indication of the fundamental continuity of the miners'



lives. In addition, by being utilised in the present, it forms the basis for future understandings and actions; as the past from which to escape, to which not to return or to whose participants a sense of obligation is owed.

However, we have also seen that not all the miners manifested a clearly developed sense of the historical legacy and identity. It has been suggested that this is due not to changes within the work sphere, though clearly there have been great changes over the last forty years since nationalisation, for continuity of work mitigates against this. Rather, it has been argued that those less integrated into the mining fraternity are those less able to draw upon the mining identity by virtue of their more marginal relationship to the industry. It would appear from evidence so far offered that, whilst this is not a clear-cut distinction, those not from mining families have proved more susceptible to instrumentalist, individualistic attitudes. Although seeing their work as objectively different, it is seen as a job. Being a miner entails a description of an occupational identity rather than also involving adherence to a socio-political identity expressing the relationship **between** miners. It is in this sense that we can understand how Salaman's definition of identity and value system in the occupational community is also, for the miners, a political statement. Yet we can also see that these are not uniformly adhered to.

The radical consciousness of the Fife miners cannot be said to derive purely from the work experience, therefore, but to have its potentiality laid within the world of the pit. Although the experience is similar for all the miners interviewed at a basic level, this has been experienced differently by a small minority; a phenomenon which, as we have seen, is a cause of concern for all generations of the politicised. However, that work experience is a crucial mechanism for the development of a politicised world view among the miners can be seen from the utilisation of the significant history of work, and adherence to the collective identity, found among politically-aligned men.



## CHAPTER FIVE.

## THE MINING COMMUNITY: A WORLD WITHIN THE WORLD.

5.1 Introduction.

This chapter seeks to elucidate the ways in which the miners' senses of self-identity and consciousness are coalesced by their perceptions of their community and the changing place this occupies within the wider society. It shall be argued that the experiences of pit and village, as structural properties, act as resources and regulators of thought and action. The world of work has historically been reinforced by the actuality of life within the mining communities yet has crucially affected the ways in which these became ordered. Together they have confirmed the immanent socialism contained within the nature of the employment and spread it beyond the pit. The communities, therefore, are an educational system, an informal means of informing and regulating social behaviour away from the pit but in the ways of the pit. The community, as educator and regulator of the values of the pit, thus binds inhabitants into a particularistic value system and identity crucially directing actors' lives. In this way the community is a vital mechanism for consciousness formation and transmission. Yet these perceptions of self, with their consequences for social and political beliefs, are enhanced when seen in relation to the world at large, and the ways in which miners perceive non-miners view the occupational group. The treatment of the miners by the wider society thus serves to compound identity and the sense of difference.

The assumptions underlying this issue, therefore, are concerned with the creation of self-identity and imagery in relation to both the mining, and non-mining, communities. Yet the central interests of the project are not with the differing types as spatio-temporally located phenomena, but how they act as perceptual mechanisms formulating a sense of social distinction and, thus, collective consciousness. 'Community', therefore, is



regarded as an abstract construct whereby people identify the differences between themselves and others and thus define their world. This conceptualisation of community has fruitfully been explored by Anthony Cohen who utilises the idea "of social organisation as a means through which people order, value and express their knowledge of their worlds of experience, rather than as a structural determination of such knowledge and experience[1]." This emphasis on the cultural aspects shows how community is "meaningfully constructed by people through their symbolic prowess and resources[2]." For Cohen, community is relational, and exists as a juxtapositioning of group and non-group members. One's self definition is formed through the awareness of difference from others. It is for this reason that Cohen emphasises the importance of boundaries. He argues:-

... people become aware of their culture when they stand at its boundaries. Such boundaries are not 'natural' phenomena: they are relational, they may be contrived and their very existence is called into being partly by the purpose for which one group distinguishes itself from another. But all this is to say that one's culture is at the forefront of consciousness and social process[3].

In this context it is useful to draw attention to the two ways in which miners themselves speak of 'community'. Whilst miners speak of 'mining communities' - such as Lumphinnans, Lochore, Glencraig, Oakley or Blairhall - this is in a situated context: geographical areas within which miners have existed and acted as the dominant force shaping social life. When speaking of their culture they talk of the 'mining community'. This term refers not to the physical actuality of pit villages, but is an ideological concept whereby they identify a **community of interests**, a sense of social and cultural solidarity with other miners. In this sense it bears affinity with the concept of occupational community discussed in the last chapter. Therefore, whereas the first definition is drawn upon to refer to Miners' Clubs, social and political events, pipe bands and all the other collective institutions of their lives, the latter relates to the abstract world of identity, values and the mining way of life. It is a



community of the mind, of consciousness and commitment. It is to this world that we seek access.

Yet this is not to argue that the 'real world' is an irrelevance. The pit villages with their distinctive way of life revolving around the pit are a central aspect to the miners' lives. Culturally, the perceived assault upon their communities and way of life is currently a source of grave concern to the Fife miners. It is here that industrial decline is most readily visible. All the miners interviewed regarded this development with a great sense of loss. Some think they still exist, but few perceive themselves as currently living in a mining community. If they are to be found it is elsewhere. For those living in the East of the county, it is the West which is still a mining community, for those in the West, then perhaps in the Methil area on the East coast. One of the few who regarded himself as residing in a mining community was flatly contradicted at a later date by another miner, whose garden backs onto that of the first, who stated that the community had gone. The county is perceived as differentiated, therefore, even though it is a 'mining community' when viewed holistically. This difference is based on material difference, yet its full impact is perceptual. One must explore the consequences of this. Of further relevance is the way in which changing historical circumstances are perceived by the miners, and how they view this threat to the identity of the collectivity; for it is communal breakdown which is held largely responsible for the growth of the individualistic instrumentalism discussed in the last chapter.

Central to this perception of change is the particularistic view held about the mining community of the past. It is in relation to the significant portrayal of communal history that miners both define themselves and assess their contemporary circumstances; that is, that the present is defined and accounted for in terms of a past which is presented in a significant way. Miners of all age groups and of differing levels of political articulacy, make constant reference to the community of the past in discussing



their lives. Yet their perceptions of the past are, to some extent, romantic. A nostalgia for a 'golden age' of mutuality and shared hardship. These should not be dismissed, however, as 'untrue' or dubious statements of little value for they tell us much about what the miners deem worthy and of value in life; that is, they can be regarded as providing the examples for a 'transcendental value system' encapsulating what is envisualised as an ideal way of life. As we shall see, the quotations which follow all display an awareness of a significant history which has shaped perceptual orientations. The significant history of the Fife mining community thus helps us to understand who the miners are and what they esteem. As in the world of work, such expressions display the 'immanent socialism' held to underlie the miners' actuality. Yet the picture given is a complex one, for the miners also testify to the negative elements of this past from which they are glad to have escaped.

As such, the statements given reflect real social change and they must be set within this context. Thus, one needs to uncover the basis for their particularistic lifestyle in the past, and its effects on the miners, in order to understand what it is that changing historical conditions are seen as having undermined and provided. In this way, the sense of the past examined in this chapter, the stories that are told, help us gain access to the sense of identity and attitude drawn upon by successive generations. It is through this examination that one can gain insights into both the role of the communities in shaping and informing beliefs, and thus the nature of the contemporary experience.

In addition to this, however, if the mining community is a crucial mechanism in providing a sense of self-identity through showing mining families who they are in relation to each other and the pit, this is compounded by perceptions of who non-miners are, and how the wider society regards the miners. Through this the sense of 'us' is strengthened, by setting them in relation to those outwith the industry. It is contended that the ideas that miners



hold about how others see them also constitute a mechanism through which a radical identity can be produced and reproduced. The occupational and domestic spheres both serve to inculcate the miners with the belief that their work and communal lives are qualitatively different from those experienced by the majority of society. Both at home and at work the life of the miner has historically been one of hardship and danger and it is in this sense that miners are argued to hold, at a fundamental level, beliefs which are both collectivistic and oppositional. Having seen how they regard themselves, however, it becomes necessary to examine the ways in which they perceive others to view this lifestyle. If social characterisations do not accord with self-perception then this could, in itself, act to harden and draw together the group by creating feelings of injustice against detractors. Cohen indicates the possibility of this when he argues:-

When the community presents itself to the outside world... it simplifies its message and its character down to the barest of essentials. The message, therefore, is frequently experienced by the members of the community as a misrepresentation, for they find the composition of their collectivity inexpressibly complex[4].

What shall be argued is that the miners do not necessarily believe themselves to be playing an active part in the creation of this social imagery but that, rather, it is seen as having resulted from a distorted image held in society which portrays them in terms of a simplistic master-status, carrying assumptions about who and what the miners are, which has been enabled by their historical communal isolation. What is important is not that their views on societal perceptions of themselves are 'true', but how these act as a mechanism which reinforces their own self-identity. Further, by placing this within spatio-temporal circumstances, one can gain insights into the consequences of change to this imagery and identity. Thus we must explore both miners' perceptions of their communities and their interaction with society over time to analyse the ways in which the sense of identity has developed into the contemporary period.



## 5.2 Pit Village. Village Pit.

It is within discussions of the mining community of the past that we can see very clearly the value system underlying the beliefs of miners of all age groups and political attitudes. It is through their characterisation of the communal past that we can see the significant history of the Fife miners in action. It is a portrayal wherein the benefits of unity greatly outweigh the material and communal deprivations that miners experienced in the past, and which have been largely overcome. Yet unity was tied to that hardship, and thus it is a world seen as having been gradually lost.

There is a common accord among the sample that the nature of the mining communities, growing-up around new sinkings, stems directly from the experiences underground. Thus if the village serviced the pit, it also was serviced by the pit. In this way a common value system developed which covered both industrial and domestic spheres. One communist in his 50s speaks of how historically the mutuality of the pit played out into the community:-

The guid thing was the camaraderie that was there. Ah mean, anybody that was in need, was ayeways helped. Ah can remember ma mother, fur example, was midwife and nurse tae neighbours, and so on.... It was reciprocal, it was done all over. And, o' course, that derived fra' miners helping each other doon the pit, fur example. That sortae camaraderie spilled oot intae the communi'y.

The socio-economic homogeneity of the mining villages meant that these values and customs were felt to be incorporated into the total community rather than being associated merely with a faction within the wider settlement, and thus were intrinsic to the whole way of life. One Labour Party member in his 30s recalls the uniformity within his own village in West Fife which existed even during his own childhood:-

Ah mean, ah come fra' Blairhall which has maybe, what, there's only 5 streets in it, 7 streets, and ootae they 7 streets when ah was a loddie, ah mean, if somebody warked in the toon, ken, it was unusual, like, ye know. If somebody had tae get the bus intae Dunfermline. Like, ah mean, o'er there ye're



talking aboot, ah think, 95% o' the men warked in Blairhall or Valleyfield pits, or in Comrie pit.

In such circumstances a close relationship is held to have existed between the industry and the villages which inevitably meant that the concerns of the pit became those of the settlement. The entire population's interests were geared to the events and problems underground. One man in his 50s explains:-

Ah was brought-up in a mining communi'y in Kelty. There were 5 or 6 pits grouped roond aboot it. And, o' course, the whole communi'y spirit was geared towards the industry. Almost all o' the femillies had people who warked in the pits. That was the topic o' conversation.

In such an environment, therefore, inhabitants assumed a close identity with the industry. A 55 year communist explains:-

Ah think ye've got an identity wi' all other miners, and it breeds that sense o' communi'y and dependence on each other. Ah think it daes that, raither than warking in a factory. Ah mean, ah did wark in a factory. Ah mean, ah spent ma apprenticeship in a factory and the spirit's no' the same. It's no' the same thing warking in the factory as warking doon a mine. Gaeing doon that cage together, intae the earth together tae take oot coal. It breeds a cer'ain kindae individual. Ah don't think it breeds individualism, this looking aifter yursel, tae hell wi' everybody else. Ah think there is that communi'y spirit aboot things, ye know. If ye look at Miners' Welfares, and Miners' Institutes, and hoo miners help every other kindae organisation. They've got a sympathy wi' all kinds o' other organisations. Traditionally, the ald folk, and everybody else, and the band. And the village revolved aroond aboot the Miners'. There was a sense o' communi'y aboot all that that in ma opinion daesnae exist anywhere else. And there was a feeling that the pit in some sense belanged tae ye, and ye were pairt o' it, ye were pairt o' that communi'y. And the pit meant something. As ah say, the miners are the only people that ah've ever met who talk at length aboot their wark away fra' it. They're still digging coal that they dug 30 years ago! When they sit doon tae talk aboot things, they talk aboot the pit.

It is in this sense that we can understand how the mining community was seen as all-embracing, tying inhabitants as workers and families into the social unit. The insularity of the mining villages, and the dependence upon the pit meant that the resulting sense of identity existed both within actors and between actors.



Sharing the same life experiences, the concerns of the mining families were felt to be identical. This bred a mutuality based upon common needs and concerns. One 72 year old communist describes the villages of his youth:-

There was, tae some extent, a feeling among the miners that it was us against the rest, ye know. And there's a tremendous atmosphere grows among miners.... where they live together, and **wark** together. And this tremendous communi'y spirit in the villages, a great solidarity. Ah'm no' talking in this sense in a political sense but the fact that they all regairded theirsels as their brother's-keepers tae a great deal o' extent. If there was an illness in the femily, everybody was interested, if there was a death, everybody was interested, an accident, everybody was interested. Ah remember ma brother that died, got verra badly burnt by a ke'le o' boiling wa'er on the top o' him. And ah remember 7 doctors in that hoose all at one time. Because all the people in the village had different doctors, but they all made their doctors come in and see what that bairn was like.... [Sol in places like Ballingry, fur example, and the village that ah come fra', Kirkford, where everybody was a miner except the baker, and the painter and, ye know, the wee grocer's shop, and the boy that sold the fish and chips, everybody was a miner, there was a **tremendous** solidarity about **everything**.

The sense of loss to be found among the miners clearly relates to the camaraderie and support that the community is held to have given one another in the past when socio-economic and occupational hardship drew forth the necessity for mutuality. Yet these qualities also tie into the value system adopted underground and, thus, reinforce each other. This commonality of communal interests also had psychological consequences for individuals. For those living within such a world the mining communities were seen as places which engendered feelings of surety among residents: the solidarity of the pit villages fostered a feeling of belonging, a security of personal identity. A retired miner expresses this well:-

[The most enjoyable aspect was] the feeling that ye belong tae a communi'y. The feeling that ye **belang** somewhere, and that ye were surrounded by men that **liked** ye, who were prepared tae **dae** things fur ye. Ye know, who would stond by ye in all kind o' circumstances. Ye know, ye never had tae look behind ye tae see who was following ye, ye ayeways **knew** there was somebody behind ye. There was this **tremendous** feeling o' security in life, ye know. Tremendous feeling that ye were



surrounded by allies. It's impossible tae convey the emotional cer'ainty that that gi's ye in yur mind.

Yet whilst such aspects of community are held to be positive qualities, the miners are aware that there were negative sides to living in a mining community also, both individually and communally. The mental prerequisites of life underground could engender a harshness of attitude among the miners which had consequences in their personal lives. Hard circumstances breed hard outlooks. The same retired miner argues:-

Fur me, the bad aspect is that ye have tae, perhaps no' quite destroy, but damage yur intellectual and emotional sensitivity or ye wouldnae survive at all. Ye couldnae stay it. Well, ye're gaeing tae see lads ge'ing their legs took aff, and arms took aff, and ye're gaeing tae see lads killed. And somebody has tae dae the job, somebody has tae, fur example, if there's a man buried, "Get \_\_\_\_ up here as quick as possible and lead the team in tae rescue that man." Try and rescue him anyway. If a man's killed, "Get \_\_\_\_ up here." There's ayeways somebody wants a leader in a si'uation like that. Yur job will maybe be tae bandage him up. Maybe even hide his wounds fra' the younger people, who will become sick, ye know. And so ye learn tae **hairden** yursel. It has a cer'ain advantage in that ye develop a capacity tae switch off aboot cer'ain things. That daesnae ayeways wark, o' course, Ye pay the penalty fur that la'er on if ye keep switching aff, and switching aff in all these emotional circumstances, ye know. But ye develop a capacity tae decide tae dae what's right nae ma'er hoo disturbing it is tae ye. Ye develop a capacity that, "This has tae be done, it's the only thing tae dae," and get the bluidy thing done. Ye know, and ye develop that capacity and therefore it has that reward. But ah think it dulls yur sensitivity aboot many other things. Ye say things that ye say tae one another in the pit which are subconsciously **designed** tae dull yur sensitivities tae pain and suffering. Well, the way ye insult one another, ye know. A man'll get his finger taken aff and ye'll say, "Christ. There's only a wee bit has gone. Roll it up and get on wi' yur wark." Ye know, things like that. Or a man'll come and say, "Is it bleeding? Well, ye're alive so what're ye worried aboot? Get on." Ye know, ye dae all these sortae things and ah think it's a subconscious effort tae keep the pain fra' spreading. Ye know, tae keep the emotional distress fra' spreading. But what ye dae then, ah think, [ma wifel keeps checking me aboot it, so ah have tae accept that it's true, ye tend tae say the same kindae things at **hame**, where the atmosphere is no' conducive tae it being accepted in the way that it should be, and somebody gets their feelings hurt.



In this sense the romantic imagery of the mining community is not total, but recognises that there were negative elements also, in this instance how the industrial influence can lead to undesirable consequences in the domestic sphere. The closeness between pit and community means that problems in the pit become involved in, and reflected in, communal life. One Labour Party man in his 40s argues:-

If ye live in a to'al mining communi'y, ah mean, if ye took somewhere like, well, take a place, which ah suppose would be the best place in the world tae use, and that's Blairhall. Noo, yoo take Blairhall, **everything** was geared up tae a pit. And everything that was bad in the pit was in the village. And there was nae way tae **change** it because nothing else **happened** in the village, it was all **mining**. And it was all the same guys that were in the pit were in the village, and so nothing was there tae sortae change things. If it was bad feeling, it came fra' the pit tae the village, fra' the village tae the pit, and back and forrad. If it was a bad way o' living, it went fra' pit tae village, fra' village tae pit, and there was **nothing** there, such as an engineering industry close by, where the guid side o', say, the engineering came in and maybe **changed** it. Ye know, something else was there tae sortae change it, [tae dilute it]. It was there, and it was there all the time, so there was nothing there tae change it abit, ye know.

At a more fundamental the very cohesion of the mining communities was itself born out of negative social factors; namely the hardships and struggles of the miners' lives. Miners acknowledge that it was, in many senses, solidarity born out of desperation. Yet despite being based on poverty and struggle this past is viewed positively on hindsight due to the resultant strength which it held to have given to the community. As such, strength through struggle plays an important part in the creation of identity through the 'significant' understanding of communal history. The perception of the past, as repeated through the above types of quotation, becomes reproduced through transmission to create a cultural repertoire for younger generations. This is typified by the statement of one 33 year old Labour Party member:-

Fife, especially Central Fife, is a solid mining area, and it's the only area tae elect a communist MP, if ah'm right. Years ago, like. And through them being a solid mining area they've aye backed each other up. Ah mean, because ye have



tae. Ah mean, ye're pushing, ye're desperate, ye need tae stand-up and fight back and get organised. Ah think Central Fife, especially Central Fife, and Leven way, and Cowdenbeath way, was solid mining areas. Ah mean, ah don't know hoo many pits were there but, Christ, ye couldnae count them.

As this quotation indicates, the hardship of the miners' lives is seen as having required the development of a collective stance to deal with the problems facing the communities. In this sense, the mining communities were, and are through contemporary understandings, for this reason, politicised at a fundamental level. The specific historical circumstances of the county, however, with the development of activists espousing coherently formulated political belief systems within the local communities, meant that this immanent collectivist attitude was made sense of, and hardened, in Fife by those prominent within the Union and political parties, especially the Communist Party. Thus, politics and the Union are crucial elements in historical identity; that is, in that they are part of the objective legacy of the county. One retired miner shows this through his description of the mining communities of the 1920s:-

... there were these low lamp-posts, and there was nae Miners' Welfares before 1926, there were nae halls in the villages at all. So ye have tae understond that, [that] at the streetcorner, or on the main road, because there were other roads running aff the streets, that's where the "parliament" met. And everyday [there] would be raging arguments o' all kinds at that streetcorner, and ayeways on a sunday there would be a public mee'ing o' some kind or another. So wi' the kids gaeing back and forrad tae the school, apairt fra' any o' the strikes altogether, these mee'ings, and the discussions, was pairt o' yur upbringing. This was where yoo were. Yoo belanged there, and they belanged tae yoo. Yur feyther was on that corner, yur uncles were there, and so forth. And it was impossible tae gae back and forrads and play there, because that's where the lights were, withoot hearing and becoming involved and being drawn in. So that the children began tae discuss what the adults were discussing. And therefore, ye ken, men like Jimmy Maxton would come and speak, Wullie Gallacher would speak, Davie Proudfoot and McArthur, and ye didnae need tae read The Times or The Observer magazines in those days tae discover hoo poor ye were.... Ah dinnae know if ah've managed tae create this kindae atmosphere fur ye, but ye've got tae understand the huge, the tremendous enthusiasm, ah would call it militancy noo but ah wouldnae have used that ward as a boy, the enthusiasm fur the strike, the solidarity o' the villages, o' which the politics, and particularly the



politics o' the Miners' Union was inescapable, even fur the youngest child.

The pit villages of the past, therefore, are regarded as having been a mainstay of support despite the hardship upon which they were based and drew strength, and as having, by their homogeneous nature, provided inhabitants with a sense of identity and security. Further, this significant history of the past is inherently political at both an implicit and an explicit level; that is, that values portrayed relate to the 'immanent socialism' which is part of the work experience, whilst at the same time this is made explicit by the crucial interrelationship between work, community and politics. However, there were negative aspects also due to social hardship and the lack of differentiation which created a claustrophobia; an insularity and preoccupation with each other's affairs.

Yet this picture, drawn from the period of greatest strength of the Fife communities during the inter-war years, was not to last, and its passing away created problems for the miners' ability to create and sustain communal identity in the face of socio-economic and cultural change. In such circumstances the community of the past became an ideal that was lost, an 'imagined' community existing as a standard against which to measure contemporary experience. The importance of communal history, therefore, operates at two levels; firstly, at a material level, as a shaping factor in the beliefs of older generations and, secondly, at a subjective level, as a significant history to be operationalised in the present to make sense of that present. The quotations in this section can thus be seen in this light; that they show a continuing reference and adherence to the norms and values encapsulated within the significant history. These are held positively by the miners, and thus continue to effect the perceptions of successive generations by expressing ideal qualities about life. The significant communal history is important, therefore, in that it teaches younger miners about how life should be. Yet that past is no more, and new circumstances have arisen. Consequently, it is how past actuality and cultural



erosion have effected identity and beliefs that has become of concern to the miners.

### 5.3 'Pit Village Nae Mair.'

Ironically perhaps, it was the attainment of the dream that contained the seeds for the demise of the pit villages: nationalisation. Whilst the miners welcomed the new security of employment and improved material conditions, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, rationalisation and modernisation dislocated the communities by closing unprofitable or exhausted village pits and forcing mining families to uproot and seek employment in the new, large, modernised productive units. One politically-unaligned man in his 60s makes the comparison:-

There used tae be the village pit, and it was no' ayeways in the village, but all the village warked in that pit. But when ye got these modern complexes like the Monktonhalls, the Bilston Glens, the Seafields, the Calvertons, and the ald village pits were shutting doon, these complexes became cosmopolitan as they came fram all areas. And there was no' the same comeraderie. Ye saw developments o' cliques within the pit.... It changed when they staired decimating the industry, closing them doon and opening the big complexes, the Longannets and Seafields, when the small pits staired tae close doon, when they staired using the axe.

These changes are regarded ambiguously. On one hand, the developments of post-war Britain with a Welfare State and mass education provided great benefits and opportunities to mining families, yet, on the other hand, it saw the erosion of the mining identity as miners either left the industry or became assimilated into more socially-differentiated communities. A Labour Party member in his 60s argues:-

Ah think when the changes staired tae happen was in the age fram the '50s right up, miners' families changed, because miners became abit mair enlightened, children got mair opportuni'y at school tae gae on fur further education. Encouragement fra' some, no' enough encouragement fra' others. They decided that the mines, warking in the mines wasnae fur ~~ma~~ family, and alot o' ma colleagues, who were brought-up in a mining history, they don't have onybody warking in the mines. Some put [their children] away tae trades, some sent them tae college tae teach, all other sorts [o' thing]. That has



developed within the mining [industry]. Noo, at one time there was verra few people taking further education and that. Ye got the odd one, ye know, gaeing tae evening classes and things like that, but it wasnae a current thing. But that's developing noo. Plus, the fact that communi'ies are ge'ing mair mixed. As ah said, there's people who maybe had mining backgrounds but **they're** no' in mining. They're sortae mixing through. And ah thought that change had taken place coming between the '60s and '70s.

Nationalisation and, more specifically, the period from the mid-1950s when, as we saw in Chapter Two, closures began increasingly to take place in the coalfield thus had a dual effect, both aspects of which served to weaken the mining fraternity; that is, it saw the dispersal of the tight communities dependent upon the local pit and the removal of families to new communities or housing estates as the old miners' rows were pulled down, and a growing heterogeneity within the pits themselves as men came to the pits from different towns and villages. Perhaps the clearest example of these changes in Fife can be seen in relation to Seafield Colliery.

Sunk in 1954 and coming into production in 1962, Seafield has always had the reputation for being a cosmopolitan pit. As the smaller, older pits in Fife were shut, miners transferred to the new complex in Kirkcaldy. Further, as an NCB designated growth area in the 50s, Fife also witnessed its second influx of miners from other parts of the Scottish coalfield, though on a lesser scale than at the turn of the century. By the 1980s Seafield was largely a commuting pit, with men being bussed in from all over the county, and with little sense of identity as had been the case in the old village pits. The disparate nature of the community underground has made it increasingly hard for miners to maintain their previous unity. One communist Seafield miner in his 30s compares the contemporary situation to that of the past:-

There's nae doubt aboot it, the closeness o' the wark in the pits was an important pairt [o' the communi'y]. Ye know, the feeling o' togetherness wi the warkforce cairried on intae togetherness wi' the communi'y, that's nae langer here. We've tae accept that. Ah mean, the pits are noo cosmopolitan. Ah warked in Comrie and la'erly ah was warking wi' some boys coming fra' Kilsyth and Airdrie, ye know what ah mean. And ah



wark at Seafield. Ah'm warking wi' boys what's living in Leven and Methilhill. So the problems that relate tae ~~ma~~ communi'y may no' relate tae their communi'y.

Fragmented into different settlements in the area, and with little socialising with workmates informally, it becomes not only harder to maintain a mining identity, but also to withstand the ideological infiltration from the wider society. The socialistic tendencies inherent within their lives have, therefore, to confront their heightened susceptibility to what are seen as anti-socialist ideologies. This factor is greater for those residing in the larger towns like Kirkcaldy or Dunfermline than for those still living in smaller residential settlements. Consequently younger miners are aware that their culture is under contemporary attack. One politically-unaligned man in his 20s argues:-

Ye gae tae somewhere like Kirkcaldy. Kirkcaldy's like a wee sortae metropolis, ye ken. And it's the big hoosing estates and the shops and that. People become alienated fra' each other, ye see. And their values stairt tae change, ken. They're just no' the same there as in somewhere like Oakley, ken. [So they've been mair infiltrated] by the Thatcher thing. Definitely. Plus, in Kirkcaldy, there's aye the big, brand-new hoosing schemes and things like that. Ye'll no' see nothing like that in Oakley, ken. There's Oakley. Council hooses, ken, and there's the Miners' Club and that, and that's that, ken. Whereas if ye gae doon tae Kirkcaldy, or tae Glenrothes or that, it's different, ye see. The Thatcher thing is there. People are buying their council hooses and think that Thatcher, that she's le'ing them get on, ken. Ah ken miners doon there, ah ken miners who are buying Telecom shares and that! Ah ken what's gaeing on.

The geographical distinction alluded to in this quotation shall be discussed more fully later in relation to the differences to be found between the West Fife and East Fife communities. For the moment what is significant about this statement is its reference to the current vulnerability of miners to individualistic philosophies propagated within British society, which was discussed in the last chapter. It would appear that the old mining communities, by their insularity, acted as an 'umbrella' against such ideas in the past, and, at the same time, to intensify the values and outlooks of the pit. As such, the



location of miners within differentiated communities is seen as encouraging the characteristic of individualism, and, thereby, undermining the traditional Fife political and social ideals of collectivism[5].

It would thus appear to be the threat of communal breakdown, rather than industrial change, which most strongly threatens the miners' identity and attitudes. The absorption of the miners into non-mining settlements which enhances such traits is compounded by the removal of the Union, and thus political parties from their immediate environment. Unlike in the pit villages, where everyday affairs were largely governed by Union officials, as shall be seen later, social change means there has been a decline in access to beliefs which would mitigate against such ideas. As such, individualism has gained a larger place in outlooks. Yet there are many who regard this with misgiving. One retired Labour Party man in his 60s makes the comparison between attitudes towards the Union in the past and present and relates this to changing social forces: -

At one time, although [many] were never sortae activists, pairt o' the commi'ee or being an official, they were all Union men, and they all wanted tae know what was gaeing on. But at the moment, there's probably quite a good percentage o' younger people in the mining industry who are only concerned when they hit a crisis, but they're no' tae concerned tae attend branch mee'ings and things like that.... Ye've got a good [element] o' activists, but there's a sortae complacency, and if ye've got a strike on, everybody's there, they're all there. But immediately the strike's settled they're no' backing ye, ye know. They're no' interested tae see what their fu'ure is. Some stuck on, ye know, and become guid lads. But ah think that's the same in socie'y all over.... At one time they were a close communi'y. Noo they're like everybody else. They're looking tae be upsides wi' every other person, as far as material things are concerned. Cars, videos and all the type o' things that come.... They're just becoming members o' communities, in general.... They've spread oot, and they've went and lived in communi'ies. As ah said, some o' them have bought their hoose, in Dunfermline, and some o' they areas, ye know. And even that, they'll say, "He's ge'ing on. He's bought a hoose in Dunfermline," or something, ye know. But that's happening mair often noo.



The change is largely seen as being due to changing policies in town planning. The old miners' rows, despite their lack of amenities, the overcrowding and poor construction, are viewed as having been more conducive to a social lifestyle which the miners miss. Thus whilst conditions were bad in the old communities, this was compensated for by the type of lifestyle by which the mining families lived. One retired communist in his 60s recalls:-

Well, ah suppose it's progress in a sense. Ah mean, at one time, when it was the miners' rows and ye just lived door-tae-door, and ye just came oot one door and in tae another one, and e'body sortae mingled free. And it was a change fur the be'er, building the council estates and that. And then ye became mair remote, because ye were living in yur ain hoose, and ye had yur ain wee bit gairden, and ye hadnae the same social atmosphere that was in the time o' the miners' rows. The miners' rows created that. Ah mean, they were hellish hoosing conditions, but because o' the proxim'y ye were in tae each other, ye were friendlier, ye know. But ah think that was lost when they staired building the big council estates.

Modern estates and flats, therefore, whilst preferable from all material aspects, are seen as having eroded that lifestyle. Thus, although they have welcomed the better standards of living, they miss that past communality which is seen as characterising their culture at the time of its greatest strength. Progressive social policies have been a mixed blessing. One man in his 50s explains:-

They feel that the communi'y spirit has been broken up. Possibly by the planners, who planned new types o' hooses. Ah mean, miners' rows were almost built fur communal living, weren't they? They were close-knit, compact. Had backyards, outside loos, fences that the women could speak tae each other over, they all burnt the same fuel. There was a commonness about it. Everybody almost shared each other's problems because they lived in a similar type o' habitat and so on. Their families went tae the same schools. Their men often warked in the same pits, and so on. And then the planners came along and staired building council hooses fur them, wi' a big high wall, they were semi-detached. Then they built these skyscraper flats, and stuck them away at the top. They deprived them o' using coal. Gave them a financial allowance fur no' being able tae use coal, and stuck them intae flats and so on. So ye almost thought it had been a deliberate break-up o' the mining communi'y, fra' a planning sense, ye know. [It is a mair alienating type o' lifestyle].



Yet these changes are not viewed as being spread consistently across the county, but as mainly characterising East Fife, usually perceived as being that part of the coalfield stretching from the Cowdenbeath area of Central Fife through to Leven. The West is regarded as being more typified by smaller mining villages and, as such, as having been able to withstand more fully the attack on traditional values. One 33 year old from Cowdenbeath states:-

Nowadays, in Fife, tae find a mining communi'y, or a mining village as such, ye have tae gae tae West Fife. Places like, say, Oakley, Blairhall, Valleyfield, where it's still the isolated village.... East Fife, Methil, Leven, Kirkcaldy, ah'd say they've to'ally lost their mining identi'ies. Central Fife, Cowdenbeath, Lochgelly, are losing theirs as well, fur the simple reason that the collieries are nae langer there. The number o' miners employed in the toons has dropped drastically o'er the last few years and although we're a mining toon, we're losing the mining identi'y, which is a tragedy really.... Having warked in Comrie Colliery, which was a West Fife colliery, and transferred tae Seafield, which is an East Fife colliery, the difference in the men, ah no'ice a big difference. The West Fife men, and ah'm no' trying tae say this in a bad way or be derogatory tae them, but they've got the mining village mentali'y, which is missing in somebody fra' the likes o' Methil where it's a big toon. Mining, ayeways an important pairt o' the economy, was never, ye know, such [a vital thing]. And it was shown-up during the strike. Fur instance, most o' the scabs that warked in Fife came fra' East Fife, where the mining communi'ies and mining villages in West Fife felt solid because they had the, ye know, "This is oor village," type mentali'y.... Ah'm no' saying there wasnae scabs in West Fife, but they were verra few and far between. But most o' the scabs that did break the strike came fra' East Fife, and, tae me, that's why. Because they've never had the same closeknit, ye know, communi'y such as what ye find in a mining village.

Most relate these differences to the socio-economic composition of the respective areas. East Fife contains the larger towns of Kirkcaldy, Leven and Methil, in which there is a greater diversity of industry. Further, historically, by being on the coast, the East had a thriving fishing community which meant that the villages did not possess the homogeneity of the West Fife villages[6]. Yet the difference, as the above quotation indicates, is not merely an objective one, but is viewed as engendering a qualitative difference in the type of people it



produces. The West Fife miners are commonly regarded as being more politically-oriented than those in the East. One 27 year old communist states:-

... the differences are there. It's haired tae pinpoint but ah would say the differences are that the West Fife miners have ayeways looked on their si'uation politically, ah think, and the East Fife miners have looked on their si'uation as industrial. Industrial struggles.

As such, the geographical differences between the two areas are regarded as having fostered different cultural and perceptual patterns in that the West Fife miners are perceived as being more militant than their counterparts in the East of the county both historically and currently due to a greater occupational homogeneity. One retired miner from Cowdenbeath explains the difference he found when transferring from the Fordell pit to Seafield, and explains the relationship between the differing objective conditions and subjective outlooks:-

Well, ah thought there was a difference when ah went doon tae wark in Seafield. Ah didnae take tae East Fife miners at all. Ah thought they werenae as militant as the miners fra' West Fife. It just seemed tae be that the miners were closer together in this area seemingly than what they were [there]. Mair ready tae stand by one another, ah thought. The West Fife miners were mair ready tae stond by.... Ah think one o' the reasons fur it aroond aboot here was the fact that there was actually mair mining communi'ies in this area, where in East Fife they werenae just mining, they were fishing, they were a mixed communi'y, ye know. The likes o' Buckhaven and Methil, as well as being miners there was the fishing industry tae, so there was a mixture o' the two.

The picture is one, therefore, wherein, despite a gradual erosion of the historical mining communities within Fife and the consequent ability to maintain identity, this is subject to spatial differentiation in that certain areas have managed to maintain the traditional lifestyle to a greater extent than others due to a continuing comparative homogeneity. It is within such communities that the solidarity of the past is proving most easy to perpetuate, and which consequently conform most closely to the paradigm contained within the significant history. Yet this



previous solidarity was both a source of strength and of weakness. Whilst it served to instill a strong identity among inhabitants of the mining communities, it also meant that the miners were sectarian in outlook. Isolated within pit villages, miners have found it hard to come to terms with the beliefs and outlooks that govern other sections of society. As we shall see in the next section, community strength has been societal weakness. The uniformity within the community led to misrepresentation, misunderstanding and mistrust between miners and those outwith the communities.

#### 5.4 'What, Nae Whippets?'

If the ability of the miners to create and sustain their group identity has, and is felt to have been, eroded by the changes witnessed within the industry and community, there was a widespread belief to be found within the sample that the image given to the miners has not substantially changed over time, albeit that the major reasons for this imagery have. In relation to this aspect, therefore, little has appeared to have changed overall and the continuation of the imagery of the past is felt by both old and young alike. Historically, it is felt to have been the invisibility of the miners to wider society, locked-away in geographically isolated communities, that was responsible for the creation of a strong 'master status' in the light of which miners were held. One communist miner in his 30s argues:-

The verra thing, the verra thing that gave us strength also gave us weaknesses, if ye understond what ah'm ge'ing at. Ah mean, ye had the isola'ed mining communi'y, which gave the communi'y strength, but the fact it was isolated meant it was misunderstood in the terms o' socie'y as a whole.

This isolation is felt to have created the conditions wherein could develop a negative social image based on the nature of the miners' labour. Across the whole spectrum of political opinion to be found amongst the sample there could be found an awareness of an historical stigma held against the miners. Yet this is not



seen as something which merely existed in the past which has now been overcome, but as a phenomenon which has continuing social repercussions. One miner from the Labour Party in his late 30s tells of his own personal experience of the light in which the miners are held:-

... ah went wi' a girl once. Her ald man had a fish-mongery business, just doon in Culross, which is a snobby sortae place, ye ken. An aldie-warldie place. And she had nae connections tae the pits, or her mother or feyther. And ah went wi' her a couple o' years. And ah stopped gaeing there, like, and ma mother had kept a letter she'd got fra' [the girl's] mother saying she wanted her tae dissuade me fra' gaeing wi' her because she didnae want her daughter tae mairry the son o' a miner.... Ah mean, ah can mind ma dad saying tae me, that he'd experienced all his life, he reckoned that there's a stigma about being a miner. And ah used tae think, "That's wrang." Like, 1960s, 19--. "That's rubbish." It's true.

Despite changes to the miners' working and living conditions, they feel themselves portrayed in a light which is based more upon the past than contemporary actuality. The reasons held to be behind this and how some people are capable of overcoming what is seen as the distortion will, along with miners' reactions, be discussed later. For the moment it is fruitful to identify some of ways in which they feel themselves to be held. The basis for this stigma is seen as grounded on both social and political factors. The first relates to the dirty nature of an underground employment, and the second to social images of the miners as militant. In Scotland the former type of explanation is enhanced due to the bonded nature of the miners until legislation in 1799. As, rather than ending bonding at once, miners had to work their way to freedom over a period of years dependent on their age, bonded miners could be found for many years after the new laws[7]. As such, one of the reasons that other people are held to 'look down' on miners is that until the last century the Scottish miners were slaves. One 55 year old explains:-

It's no' so lang in this area that miners were slaves. Slavery died fairly late in the mining industry in this area. Ah mean, up the road here, at Fordell, up till the end o' the 19th century there were still slaves. Ye sold yur son at the company store sortae thing.



These conditions, under which miners could be found to labour into the 19th century, are seen as providing the rationale behind miners having been held to be lower socially than other sections in society and being accorded different, and secondary, treatment. It is by virtue of an awareness of this historical past, therefore, that contemporary miners can make sense of, and explain, their image. A communist in his 50s argues:-

The miners at one time, och, way back, in the burial grounds, they were separate, apairt fra' what even the ordinary labourer was.... The ordinary labourer wasnae buried in the same place. Even an ordinary labourer seen himsel as above a miner, a class above a miner. They were the lowest o' the low, and they wouldnae be buried [wi' the miners]. Their families wouldnae allow them buried [wi' the miners]. The miners had separate burial grounds.... [The miner] was away doon underground. He was the lowest o' the low.

If this past is used to explain the background to the stigma, by rationalising it in terms of the almost bestial conditions that prevailed historically in the industry, and the social treatment with which they were subsequently met, this is seen as still having credence amongst the wider society. Thus, the negative imagery in which they feel themselves to be evaluated is seen as being based on an outmoded idea of what mining entails and their previous lowly social worth. In this sense, the historical legacy is one to which the miners are compelled not merely through their own lives, but through the perceptions others hold about their past. One politically-unaligned electrician in his early 20s relates an anecdote that encapsulates this and, further, links such images to perceptions of miners' worth:-

Ah went tae the doctor's as ah had a sair leg, and ah think this sortae sums-up people's image o' a miner, they've got this ald image o' crouching at a coal-face using a pick tae get the coal aff. Because ah had a sair leg, ah'd ripped a muscle at the back o' ma knee, and he says, "Nae swimming. Nae lang walks. Nae running. But ye'll be a' right at yur wark when yur crouching." And, ah mean, ah sortae looked at him and says, "Ah'm an electrician. Ah dae alot o' walking." It's the idea he's got. Noo, that's a doctor, and he's got an idea o' someone crouching at the face wi' a pick and actually picking the coal oot. And alot o' people ha' got this idea o' that. When ah tell them ah'm an electrician at the pit they



think, "Och. Ye'll be warking on the surface." And ah say. "Undergroond." "Undergroond? Is there electricians undergroond?" They think it's completely daft. They dinnae think there's any electricians doon there at all. They just dinnae have an idea.... They're warking wi' the idea o' a man, stripped tae the waist, warking in maybe a 3 foot high seam wi' a pick. And maybe no' a verra bright chap. Ah don't think they credit miners wi' alot o' brains at all. Ah gae tae the Rugby Club, and it's just people think if ye wark doon the pit ye're no' verra bright. Miners got this stigma in the past because they werenae verra educated and it stuck. People think ye're sub-human.

This image of the miner as in primitive underground conditions has broader consequences, as the previous quotation indicates, in that there is perceived to be an implicit judgement made about miners as people due to the objective conditions of their labour. This value judgement is held to be unjust, for it fails to see the miners as victims of these conditions. As such, the wider society is seen as meting out unjust definitions of the miners. One redundant miner in his 50s, recalling the period before the introduction of pit-head baths, clearly indicates this:-

... ye had a si'uation where miners had nae pit-head baths.... And it was unfortunate tae see and hear sometimes, people criticising miners who, some o' them maybe had tae travel in a bus, travel hame. And ma recollection is o' miners taking ald raincoats so they could put it over their pit-claes no' tae make a mess o' the seat. But sometimes that happened, and sometimes people criticised the fact that miners wi' their dirty pit-claes were coming on the bus, instead o' analysing the si'uation, and understanding that men should have the dignity o' a bath, and being able tae change at the end o' their shift.

This perception of negative imagery can constantly be found when miners discuss societal views, as can the sense of unfairness at this portrayal. Note the following statements, which were given by miners of varying ages and political beliefs in answer to a question asking about the image of the miners in society:-

... ah've found there's an expectation that this will be a blunt, angry, inarticulate man. Strong, tough, but fairly inarticulate. And ye constantly meet this, and ye find people patronising ye all the time.



... ye get a section o' people who look doon on the miners as bring sortae sub-intelligent creatures fra' the darkest depths o' the warld, ye ken.

Ah honestly think they think that miners are lower than theirsels. Ah don't know why they think that, but it ~~must~~ be there because ye can feel it sometimes, ye know.

... there is this image aboot a miner wi' a cloth-cap, and the dogs, ye ken, the grey-hounds, and the pigeons aboot the back door. And ah thought, "Ach, naw. That's the image o' the past, like, before the war." But, naw, that's still the image today. Ah found that oot, as ah say, ... that people still think we gae aboot wi' cloth-caps on, ye ken, dirt under yur fingernails.

At one time miners were cast aside, ye know. They werenae human beings.... They thought the miners had nae intellect. They thought the miners only thought aboot boozing and having bairns.

... moneyed people [think they're] animals. They're there tae be exploited.

Ah think alot o' people's image o' a miner will be o' [him daeing] a dirty, haird wark, bad conditions, [and] that [he] gaes on strike every week.

These ideas are largely regarded, as is indicated, as due to the fixed nature of the imagery, which has failed to come to terms with the changes the miners have faced. One man in his 30s relates an incident:-

Ah remember, och, it'd be be aboot 3 or 4 year ago, and ah went intae the Cowdenbeath Institute. And it wasnae lang aifter it'd been done-up, it's a wee bit dilapidated noo, but it hadnae lang been done-up and it was really nice. And ah was standing in the toilet and these two young loddies came in, well, they'd be aboot the age o' masel. But ah think they must've come fra' Forfar or Brechin, or some o' they places because they spoke wi' a sortae north-eastern accent. And ah heard one o' them say, "Ah didnae think it would be like this, a Miners' Institute." And ah honestly felt like turning roond and saying tae them, "Well, hang on a minute. Ah'll gae hame, ah'll get ma cloth cap, ma whippet, ye know, and ma knee-pads." Ah mean, ah've spoken tae people ootside the industry, ootside this area, that're amazed fur the fact that ah'm 5' 9" tall. They expect miners, seriously, ah'm no' joking, they expect miners tae be 4' nothing wi' their bonds in the air, ye know, fur warking in the wee 6" seams o' coal. Ye know, the image can be to'ally distorted, like. Ye know, at one time ye'd see armies o' them wandering aboot wi' their clogs, and their mufflers, and their cloth hats. But we're



noo intae the age o' the telephone, and the video, and the colour TV, and the car and, ye know, we've **changed**.

This master status is seen as unfairly characterising the miners into a stereotype to which they do not conform and, to which, as we shall see, they feel themselves to have been subjected to a greater extent than other workers. Another young miner from the Labour Party comments:-

Alot o' folk, who dinnae ken mining communi'ies, have never lived in mining communi'ies ah dare say, their picture o' the miner is someone si'ing in a club ge'ing drunk and gambling. That is a sortae comic-book image o' a miner. The cloth-cap and the whippet. Ah **know** that's no' what they're like. There are **some** like that, just as there's some dockers like that, some railway warkers like that. But we're no' all the same.

Yet if such opinions can be held to reflect what is seen to be the social image of the miner, they are also, as a previous quotation showed, seen as being subject to a political image wherein they are cast as the militants: the workers who cause all Britain's industrial unrest. This also is regarded as being not totally fair. Four quotations, again from different age-groups and political opinions, indicate this:-

There's the political image, where we're ultra-militants, and every strike in Britain's caused by the miners.

There's a body o' opinion that thinks that the miners are ready tae strike at the drop o' a hat. Which cer'ainly is no' true. It's no' true.

... all ma life there's only one thing that ah've ever been asked tae dae fur ma country, and that's dae withoot. Ah have never gone fur an improvement in ma conditions, whether it be safety, or health - like the fight fur the pit-heid baths, there were nae pit-heid baths when ah staired and ah was one o' the people who fought fur them - or wages, when ah wasnae gaeing tae ruin the country. Ah was **ayeways** gaeing tae ruin the country.

Well, ah don't think socie'y has got a verra high regaird fur us, if ye want tae put it that way. Ah think that they think that we're haird, that we're vulgar, that we're coarse. They associate us wi' the bonnet and, ye know, the haird ootlook tae [life]. But we're no'. We're haird when it comes tae a conflict, or we're haird drinkers, but we've got **hairts**! Ye know, and ah think **that** stonds us oot different fra' onybody else. **We've** got a hairt. While we ha' all the other things



people attribute tae miners, we've got one thing that's mair important than all the other things.

There is a conviction, therefore, that society operates by definitions that fail to grasp the complexity of, and reasons for, the miners' stances but that simply views them as having a propensity to 'mindless' industrial action. Yet there is a belief that this is unjust and that they are not the 'manual hoodlums' that they are portrayed as being. One retired communist argues:-

Ah think the press and television have created this position in regards the miners. Where they quote the disputes and so forth and so on in the mining industry. And, yes, there have been many local disputes in the mining industry but when we compare national strikes with other trade-unionists, ye know, in Britain, we've been verra moderate, because we've had verra few national strikes.

Thus whilst, as is shown in other chapters, there is a pride in the miners' historical displays of industrial strength, and this plays an important role in the creation of identity, it is also felt that this is misunderstood and not grasped with a full understanding of the reasons for such action, but is taken simply on the surface, without analysis of their case and turned into a master status of 'troublemakers'. Yet such stereotypical imagery is seen as subject to differential adherence. The breakdown of the communities with the decline of the industry has meant that miners are more accessible to non-miners due to their greater integration into the wider society. However, the key word to this is accessibility, for whilst people who are physically close to the miners are open to being given the miners' case, for those in non-mining areas the way in which they perceive the miners is largely dependent, as the previous indication shows, upon characterisation of the media. One communist in his 70s argues:-

Well, it's the image that the media, in the main, has given the miners. And because the miners have lived a separate life. And the only photographs [other people] ever see o' them is wi' their pit-muck and their dirt on them. And the media ayeways, "The Miners are Striking". And "the miners are daeing this", and aboot the strike, "the miners are daeing this thing". And, ye see, if a miner gaes oot there and gets intae a fight wi' a polisman or something like that, in the newspapers it'll be, "Miner Guilty of Assault". If it's a



bricklayer it's no' "Bricklayer Guilty of Assault", marra. And this has ayeways been, there's ayeways been a conscious propaganda against the miners. And, tae me, it's ayeways been deliberate.

There is an awareness that for those outwith mining areas the inability to create a firsthand picture of the miners means that the public is highly susceptible to the type of imagery they receive. This realisation means that the miners understand their vulnerability to the stereotyping the media can create. One man in his 50s argues:-

Well, where dae people get their information aboot the miners? Most people can only get it fra' the media. Ah mean, hoo daes somebody in South-East England know aboot miners other than what they get on television or through the press, which creates caricatures o' people?

As such, the miners differentiate society in terms of their access to miners to counter those images perceived through the media. The non-mining population is not regarded as an homogeneous, unsympathetic mass, therefore, but is 'graded' according to proximity. As such, non-mining Fifers, Dundonians, etc. and those on the periphery of mining areas in Scotland and the south are regarded as being more aware and sympathetic as they have a greater insight into the miners' way of life. This state of affairs is viewed as being on the increase as the miners live more fully in the outside world. This can be seen as the 'positive' side to communal breakdown. One politically-unaligned man in his 60s argues:-

In the '20s and '30s [the miners] were **unknown**. They were just accepted as some kindae animal that digs underground. Gets this black stuff that we put on the fire. They had nae respect because they didn't know them. In Edinburgh they saw these animals, when the Gala Day was being held in Edinburgh, and they'd say, "Look at them. Marching along there. Look at the noise they're making." Nowadays, they know quite abit. Some of it's pretty distorted, but they cer'ainly know mair than they used tae know aboot the miners. They've found oot that they're no' animals aifter all. They don't have horns and claws and things like that. That they are human beings. [Miners] are mair educated, they've come oot mair intae the world. They're associa'ing mair wi' other people. They used tae be associa'ing only wi' their ain li'le village.



This is regarded as being just, that miners have a right to live alongside other members of the community. One retired Labour Party member states:-

Ah don't think it's a bad thing [that they live in society]. Because ah think they are an important pairt o' socie'y and, ye know, ah don't see why a miner shouldnae live alangside an accountant or somebody like that. And ah feel socie'y is gaeing that way that they don't care what the boy next door tae them's daeing, what he's warking at, as lang as he's a guid neighbour or something like that.

Yet a further qualification must be made, for whilst miners of all shades of political opinion believe that negative imagery has gained widespread credence within British society, those who adhere to systemised world views have a greater belief in the public's potentiality for sympathy, and respect for the miners. Compare the following four quotations. The first two come from unaligned men of 26 and 46 years, and the second pair are from a 73 year old and 30 year old communist respectively:-

Alot o' the general public, right, ah would say that alot o' them dinnae like the miners, like. In some areas [people are sympathetic], but ye gae ootwith a mining area and ah would say there's nae sympathy.

The only time ye really get ony praise is when there's alot o' us killed, ken. They're usually trying tae run us doon.

Ah think people had an image o' the miners as a verra badly oppressed group o' people, as they undoubtedly were, and ah think most people were really aware o' that.... And we've had alot o' sympathy fra' people and we've gained a great deal fra' it.

Ah think people have a **respect** fur the miners. A respect, fur instance, in the labour movement, that we argue the case, maybe, fur less fortunate people.... So in a sortae practical sense people respect the miners fur what they dae. Ah think they respect them as well fur performing a difficult job, a verra unpleasant type o' job, and a **necessary** job.

It is amongst the activists, past and present, that this belief in the ability of the miners to gain public sympathy and support is most manifest. Socialist ideologies thus, perhaps by their very nature, imbue adherents with an optimism without which,



presumably, they would not see the point of, or find the energy for, their activism. Amongst such miners, the separateness of the industry is a positive phenomenon, unsurpassed in its humanistic appeal and principled struggle. Whilst acknowledging the material aspects of the miners' difference, therefore, they lay emphasis on the socio-political status of the miners, and that their greater politicisation enables them to frame their arguments to win public support, if that public is willing to listen. Another young communist in his 20s shows this belief in the possibility to win people over, and at the same time indicates how Fifers, through accessibility and campaigning, have been won over:-

If they were told the case o' the miners, if they **knew** the background tae the miners, ah think they **would** be sympathetic. But ah would say quite alot o' the British public is sympathetic tae them because o' the na'ure o' their wark. But if they knew the whole life, the life that surrounds a miner, ah think they would be **mair** sympathetic tae the miners.... Ah think Fife people are **mair** sympathetic because the miners' case has been brought oot tae the people, taken oot tae the people o' Fife on quite a number o' occasions, and still is ge'ing taken oot. And, ah think, the people are gaining **mair** knowledge that're associated wi' the miners, are gaining **mair** knowledge aboot the mining industry, aboot the conditions, aboot hoo the pits affect oor communi'ies.

This potentiality, however, is again dependent on the ability of the miners to take their case to the public and be heard. Thus whilst the imagery continues with the stereotyping in the media which influences non-miners, there is perceived to be a greater understanding through the social integration which has resulted from communal breakdown. To conclude, therefore, we must assess how the changes which the miners have experienced over time through their communities and social interaction have compounded to affect the sense of a mining identity and group distinction.

### 5.5 Conclusion.

We have seen that the strength of the mining communities in Fife has grown historically from the combination of hardships in the pit and in the villages, and that, to overcome these, the mining



families utilised the value system drawn-upon underground. This lifestyle has, most obviously, come under severe attack with the rundown of the industry which has served to lessen the total mining population, uproot them from the villages to transfer them to modern units, and integrate them more fully within the wider society. By divorcing the industrial sphere from the domestic a crucial element within the systemisation of the miners' beliefs, stemming from the crucial historical interrelationship between the two spheres, has been weakened. The mining identity has been further eroded by the nature of the new pits which, cosmopolitan in nature, lack the identity of interests between the miners which typified the old village pits. In such circumstances, vital mechanisms for the production and reproduction of radicalism have been undermined and left them more vulnerable to assault from the parent culture which, perceived as individualistic and uncaring, directly opposes the world view espoused traditionally by the miners.

This world view has been able to continue despite communal decline and dispersal due to the continued presence of a significant history, still present within living memory even for younger men, which has a continuing relevance for the prerequisites of their lives. This has been demonstrated by the knowledge of the past which younger men have displayed in the quotations within this chapter when talking of their community. All the quotations have, therefore, highlighted the continuing effects the significant history on the perceptions of the young; both radicals and non-radicals alike.

However, given this rundown, it would perhaps seem to indicate that the tradition may not continue. The decline of the industry is seen to have all but ended the mining way of life. Yet there is a belief that this will not desist merely with the closure of the last pit, but will be played out over time due to the continuing presence of mining families. One young man from West



Fife argues:-

The feeling's still here but, obviously, as the numbers dwindle it'll no' be as obvious. Even though people are cootae the pits, and ge'ing redundancy and that, the alder boys, they're still miners. And they've still got that communi'y spirit, and communi'y feeling, that mining communi'ies have. They've still got that. As ah see the future, when we're all coot the pits, there's nae pits left, we'll still get that bond because we've had it in the past, but it will gradually die coot.

In many ways, however, this erosion of identity which was created through the concentration of the miners within their communities has been mitigated against through the perception of their own social identity, that 'they' regard 'us' in the light of stereotypical imagery based on simplistic occupational and political master statuses which it has been possible to propagate, and difficult to challenge, due to social isolation. The perceived unfairness of such characterisation, and the failure to be able to counteract such messages, whether due to the miners' historical invisibility or the pervasiveness of the contemporary mass media, has acted to reinforce the identity. As we have seen, the stories they relate as being against themselves can help to draw the collectivity, those aware of the anomalies, together. As such, the miners can remain unified due to their perceptions of the opinion held across the boundary, in that solidarity is drawn against a world that neither understands them nor accepts their case. This is not seen, however, to engender self-pity, by any means, but would seem to lead to feelings of opposition and hostility, or a determination to embark on mass campaigning.

It is on both levels, the creation of a communal identity and value system, and of self-definition in relation to non-miners, that we can comprehend the arguments of Cohen outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Particularistic social arrangements within the communities would appear to express the collectivistic values of work and reinforce the mining identity through the way in which life is led. Yet this is further strengthened through



the sense of boundary; from those who hold different outlooks and values, and fail to grasp the ways and beliefs of the miners.

However, there was a difference to be found in attitudes to the non-mining population. Among political activists the desire to take their message to the public could be found, possibly due to their greater belief in societal preparedness to empathise with them; that is, among those whose socialist beliefs predispose them to believe in the good nature of others because of their acceptance of philosophies espousing the essential unity of humanity. Consequently, it is such miners, believing Marxist assertions as to the nature of man, that are more likely, whilst arguing that their social imagery does not convey the facts of their case, to maintain a belief that people would be prepared to listen if the miners were in a position to make themselves heard. Yet having partially accomplished this through the greater integration of recent years, societal participation is felt to have been a double-edged phenomenon, engendering both fuller acceptance and understanding, yet acting to dilute the group identity. Whether the gains were greater than the losses would be discovered in 1984, when the miners simultaneously attempted both to draw upon their historic identity and mobilise public support.



CHAPTER SIX.  
OF MINERS AND THEIR UNION...

6.1 Introduction.

Any attempt to understand the world and consciousness of the miners must seek to understand the role that their unions play within the framing of identity and meaning. The unsystematised attitudes derived from the experience of work and community must clearly be understood in reference to the role that the Union has played in attempting to alleviate and advance the conditions within which the miners live, and in the production and reproduction of beliefs. It is through such an analysis that we can ground the relationship between management and men which forms the body of the next chapter; for industrial relations will depend upon workers' orientations to their own major institutions. It is thus the task of this chapter to examine both the role that unions play within the miners' lives and the attitudes of the men to organised labour.

In this regard, however, it is felt that much of the existing literature on unions is not necessarily very helpful. Studies on the miners, such as those already referred to, have concentrated either on practical histories of the miners' Union, or on the institutional analysis of its role in industrial relations. Yet it is felt that more attention should be paid to how and why workers attach the meanings they do to Union membership, and how this membership affects attitudes and beliefs. The apparent militancy of the miners, therefore, must be grounded within the subjective understandings the men hold about their representative body, the relationship of this to lived experience, and the role of the Union in politicisation. It is in such a way that we can unravel the relationship between actuality, consciousness, the Union and politics. Our main concern, therefore, is not on a history of Union activities in Fife, but with the relationship between the subjective understandings of the radical sample and



their Unions. Two important studies may facilitate the framework within which such an analysis may be undertaken. Neither offer conventional studies of labour relations but seek to uncover the relationship between class, labour and politics.

Hamilton's work on radicalism among French workers is useful in that it ties political beliefs to the presence and activities of radical trade unions; notably communist unions. He argues that they provide the framework within which workers can understand and interpret their work experience in a systematised fashion. Trade unions, therefore, seek to use their place within the world of work to encourage radical political beliefs and show workers the connections between the economic and political levels of society according to their particular political orientation. It is among members of radical trade unions, therefore, that one can expect to find the most politically-articulate workers, capable of systematising their lived experience within a coherent world view.

The ability to engage in critique, therefore, is dependent upon the ability of unions, as 'informal primary group leaders' to provide the political frame of reference in the first instance, for it is the unions which impart a radical political education to members. The unions are thus the vital socialising mechanism. He states that he found:-

... the unions to be the key agencies in the support or dissemination of political beliefs... union membership comes close to being the most important correlate of political beliefs[1].

Consequently, we would expect that among groups of radical workers that unions would be a crucial source of strength to members, and means of imparting a strong group identity. Yet Hamilton's work has been criticised by Gallie, who disagrees that unions are responsible for developing that radicalism[2]. He regards Hamilton's conclusions that unions increase support for the left through enhancing a sense of social injustice as problematic. He argues that unions have little effect on perceptions, and, indeed, goes on to say that workers may reject unions adopting a political



role in that such activity is seen as engendering divisions among the workforce, and consequently mitigating against unity in action. He believes, rather, that workers formulate their political ideas before joining a radical union, and points to the correlation between radicals and their families, emphasising that unaligned and radical workers tend to come from corresponding types of family.

The questions therefore centre upon the meanings Union membership holds and the relative importance of the Union in formulating particularistic beliefs among workers. The debate seeks to uncover how important the unions are in establishing identity and beliefs among workers. Yet Gallie's comments also raise the issue of the historical dimension, and how knowledge of the past, gained informally through familial or communal stories, or formally through the trade union, may serve to instill consciousness into successive generations of workers.

## 6.2 Attitudes towards the Union.

There is a common perception in the academic literature that miners' attitudes to their Union are somehow 'special' and that there is a union loyalty to be found among the miners which is unique within the British labour movement. The Union is held to play a greater part in the miners' lives than is the case among other workers and that consequently, as Allen claims, it "is impossible to understand the industrial behaviour of the miners without first recognising their commitment to their Union[3]." It is held that the hardships of the pits and mining communities fostered such basic orientations, and that it was only as a consequence of the activities of the Union that benefits were won. The Union, therefore, deserves that loyalty. In this way, the militancy of the miners is not seen purely as an instrumental phenomenon, but as grounded within both the needs and values of the collectivity. This belief in the willingness of the miners to engage in industrial struggle and defend their rights holds a firm



place also within the perceptions the sample held about their Union.

It is this reputation as fighters which they see as giving them a place at the forefront of the labour movement, and is based upon the former importance of the industry to the British economy and the numerical strength they once enjoyed, for these factors enabled them to play a strong role within British industrial action. This assumption that miners will always engage in struggle can be found among miners of all ages and political beliefs and is accounted for in two major ways; firstly, due to the nature of their work, and secondly, because it is traditional to do so. A 66 year old unaligned man argues:-

The role [o' the miners] is exactly the same as it was when ah furst went intae the pits, and that is tae be in the leadership o' the trade and union movement tae fight fur be'er conditions fur the warking people o' this country, independent o' what they dae, or what pairt o' society they live in. [The miners] have ayeways been the people that have been the fighters. They have ayeways been the people that have been attacked furst by the ruling classes. And the reason they're attacked furst is because they dae fight, and they dae have the historical background o' being fighters, because o' the adverse conditions that their forefeythers had tae bear up tae and fight fur. And the historical knowledge is passed doon fra' feyther tae son aboot what it was, and what it represents. It's class consciousness. That's the substance o' it.

This quotation serves to show how this particularistic identity is kept alive across the generations through personal interaction, yet also indicates how the miners interviewed see themselves as being at the forefront of the onslaught from significant others; whether pit-owners, managers or whatever. This position and their willingness to fight on behalf of others as well as themselves is part of the reason that they regard themselves as the vanguard of the labour movement, and explains the belief that a defeat for the miners is a defeat for everybody. This perception results in what may be seen as a feeling of moral responsibility for workers in other industries and other sections of society. This is argued



by a 73 year old communist:-

The miners have **ayeways**, historically speaking, miners have **ayeways** led. They have been the advance guard o' the British warking class in all their struggles. And people look tae the miners tae fight. And, in fact, many warkers will say tae ye, "Christ, if they can beat the miners, what chance ha' we got?" Because we are the best organised, because we're the **easiest** tae organise, because o' the na'ure o' the industry.

It can be seen from this quotation how perceptions that both they hold, and they see others holding, may act to reinforce a collectivistic identity built upon opposition. Even those without committed political beliefs view their Union as an important and necessary institution to which public support must be given. Thus, even though the rank and file may criticise the leadership privately, the Union is regarded as deserving loyalty when necessary. One retired local leader explains:-

If the Union says that's what ye're gaeing tae dae, that's what ye're gaeing tae dae. Because they **know** that withoot the strength o' the Union ye're only an individual. Experience has **taught** them this. The tradition still continues. There can be lapses o' it, because they're **verra highly critical** o' their Union. It's **their** Union, and they're **verra** conscious o' the fact it's their bluidy Union, and they love tae kick their Union officials' arse. Even mine! They love tae tell ye aff, just tae keep ye in yur place. Which is **verra** guid fur ye. And sometimes they'll say, "That bluidy decision is just stupid and we're no' having it." But, in the main, if there's a national issue, and the Union takes a national decision, the miners will correspond tae that decision. Because they're **verra** well aware that their unity is their strength. It's no' just an idle slogan. It's a fact o' life.

It can be seen that there is a pride derived from being part of a disciplined workforce who hold a strong loyalty to their Union. This belief, as is voiced above, is based upon the idea that unity is a fundamental prerequisite for workers who, without this quality, would be at the whim of management. Such perceptions can be found also among younger workers. A 35 year old communist argues in the wake of the Union split:-

Well, ye see it on the Union banners, "Unity is Strength." And, ah mean, these arenae just wards. It's important tae have one Union and tae be strang, tae represent the men as a whole, tae fight fur the conditions in the pit. Ah mean, ah'm



talking aboot pit level, ye know. If ye take, fur instance, in the likes o' No'ingham, and Leicester, where the warkforce are divided between the likes o' the UDM and NUM. Ah've got friends doon these that regularly write up tae me. And the Coal Board, sorry, British Coal, are snipping away. The bonuses are gaeing doon, and, ye know, the conditions, ye know what ah mean. A divided warkforce is easy pickings tae the Coal Board.

Such expressions, which testify to the social ideas about the loyalty of the miners mentioned earlier, however, would appear not to be the result purely of political indoctrination by the Union, as was suggested by Hamilton's work, but are rooted within the experience of the pit itself. Rather, the immanent socialism deriving from the necessity of occupational collectivism in the face of the physical task itself, is rendered more specifically industrial by the values of the Union. Work and Union ideals are thus intimately related within the life experiences of the miners. The 'fighting' nature of the miners which, as has been noted in a previous chapter, is based within the combative prerequisite of mining, serves to imbue the miners with industrial qualities in that there is a preparedness to stand up for what are regarded as their rights; that is for 'decent moral treatment'. One 33 year old Labour Party member argues:-

Ah think due tae the na'ure o' their wark they're maybe less tolerant than other folk. The likes o', ken, if a miner's warking underground, say, right, he's warking in heavy wa'er, and he gaes in and asks fur another pound wa'er money, and the management, ken, dinnae gi' him it. Ah mean, a miner'll stond on the pit-heid and he'll say, "Right. We're no' ge'ing it. We're hame. The shift's hame." That's it, like, ken. That's just the way it is. Ah mean, if ye feel ye've got a justified case and the management's wanting nothing tae dae wi' ye, ye just [dae that]. Ah think, at the back, it expresses tae the management, or tae onybody else, that we're no' eating shit fur naebody, like. Ken, ah mean, we're no' greedy. Ah mean, ye take 100 miners, and 99.9% o' they miners are quite reasonable people, ken. They've got emotions and they feel things tae. And if they gae wi' what they think is a justified claim, and the Union gaes and fights that, and [management] throw it oot, they feel hurt at that. But when it comes tae the crunch, it's "them-and-us", like.

The quotations in this section have thus demonstrated the presence of strong beliefs in the necessity of the Union among the sample,



and the relationship of this to the lived experience of work in the pits historically. Further, this Union membership instills feelings of pride among the men, due to its reputation as being prepared to engage in collective struggle and the solidarity of its members. Yet if the potentiality for the type of Union solidarity witnessed above lies within the nature of employment, both historically and contemporarily, there is no inevitability that this will be coalesced into either Union loyalty or coherent socialism, but may be dependent upon the abilities of the Union to create solidaristic attitudes, as Hamilton's work suggests. The history of the Nottingham miners is diametrically opposed, in many ways, from that of the Fife miners for during the inter-war years, for example, in that their breakaway Union resulted in right-wing Spencerism rather than a communist-led Union. As we saw in the previous section, Hamilton argues that the unions themselves are a vital means of socialising workers, and thus we must see in what ways the Union itself acts to promote and manifest such ideals, but we must also locate this within the historical structure of the Union to establish that from which this socialisation may come. Thus we must examine the particularistic development of the Union, and its historical form, in order to determine that from which the miners have come, and that within which they find themselves.

### 6.3 The Scottish Area.

There is a strong perception among the Fife miners that there are distinct geographical differences between the areas of the Union. This is because the NUM, unlike other national unions, is essentially a federated one, with each area maintaining considerable independence in routine matters and daily activities. The argument put forward, in simplified form, is that if the miners' Union is more militant than other unions, then within the NUM Scotland is one of the most militant areas, and the Fife miners, especially since the demise of Lanarkshire, is the backbone of the Scottish Area. As such, one must look at both



national and regional levels to examine the factors which may facilitate the sytemisation of radical thought.

From the Scottish Miners' Federation through the NUSMW to the Scottish Area of the NUM, the Scottish miners have historically taken an active role within the wider British labour movement[4]. Led by men such as Alexander MacDonald, Robert Smillie and Abe Moffat, they have a tradition of mobilisation on issues both concerning their own industry and the wider society. The great majority of the miners interviewed, however, have experience almost purely of the Union under nationalisation; only one of the sample having worked solely under private ownership. As we shall see in the next chapter, the Scottish Area was one of the first to voice its disquiet about the nationalised industry, and has been consistent in its support for action to advance the Union's position since the 1940s. Thus, for example, Scotland actively campaigned for strike action in 1970 at which time other areas were still not prepared for a dispute, 77% of the membership voting in favour, and members of the Scottish Area addressed pit-head meetings at each colliery to each shift as well as sending out leaflets to all the miners and their wives. Such stances have earned the Area a reputation of industrial and political militancy, yet this was also based within the strategic importance of heavy industries such as mining to the Scottish economy. A communist in his 50s sums-up the reputation of the Scottish miners:-

... the Sco'ish miners did represent a verra powerful force within the Sco'ish labour movement. No' just within trade-union circles, but within political circles, and they identified theirsels with alot o' progressive causes, and the cause o' the pensioners and so on. The Sco'ish miners' Union has played a verra progressive role within no' just the trade-union movement but the political movement in Scotland. Ah hope this daesnae sound parochial, but ah've ayeways reckoned that the Sco'ish miners' Union was mair politically advanced, has taken-up mair progressive positions. Ah mean, ah actually think that the whole Sco'ish labour movement and the Sco'ish people are in a mair advanced political position than the rest o' Britain. Ah think it's got alot tae dae wi' the history. The history o' the country. A whole lot o' things. It's got a touch o' nationalism about it. It's got something tae dae wi' the development o' Scotland, the kind o'



industries. The heavy industries - mining, steel, shipbuilding, Red Clydeside. It's got political things that's got tae dae wi' the role o' John MacLean, and Gallacher, and all these people.

If the historical reputation of the Scottish Area can act in this way to instill a pride in identity with a section of the labour movement seen as progressive, and defined as such in terms of the political identification with the aims of the Scottish Union, then we must see how such a factor is mobilised; that is, the mechanisms which allow the reproduction of the identity and legacy over time. Central to this is the nature of political activities within the coalfield at a national level, and in which the Fife Union participates.

Whilst, as has been mentioned above, the Scottish Area has been active in an industrial organisational sense, engaging in compensation cases, industrial disputes, collective bargaining or whatever, it is not merely an instrumental organisation but also an educative one. Important to this function are the educational schools and publications through which the Union argues its case on certain topics and thereby seeks to involve its members, and recruit new activists. Allen notes, for example, that until 1977 The Scottish Miner "was the only miners' journal which consistently challenged the legitimacy of the mass media[5]." Thus, its concerns spread outwith the purely industrial to social critique. It has taken on board the problems facing the industry since nationalisation, and sought to place these within a framework which attempts not solely to make demands but offer a philosophical grounding for its programmes. Such an approach is amply demonstrated from the following quotation from the introduction of the Scottish Area's The Miners' New Charter, published in 1974:-

We miners reject the old popular image of the miner as a person apart, conditioned by harsh, deadly conditions, living in closed conditions, to be both feared and pitied, capable of hard living in work and leisure. We have had much public sympathy on this score and in our struggles we have welcomed it. But we do not intend to live by it. We intend to change the conditions which have given rise to the truths and



half-truths about mining.... We miners refuse to accept the values which place the lowest rewards on the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs and the highest rewards on the lightest, most comfortable, least dangerous work.... We want to be rewarded for our respective contributions to the welfare of society, for our skills and for the risks we undertake[6].

Therefore, it can be seen from this example that the Scottish Area has been prepared to challenge societal values, and in a way which is explicitly political; placing its demands within a socialist framework. Yet in relation to the arguments outlined in the introduction we need to discover the affects this may have upon the membership; that is, the extent to which unions affect the political orientations of their membership, and whether this enables members to then locate their understandings in a broader social critique. Two aspects appear from the data; that the Union provides a crucial channel through which a mining identity is reproduced over time by locating miners within a sense of their own history, and by educating members in a more formal fashion. One young communist, the Secretary for his local branch, speaks of how the Union encourages a sense of belonging and both an awareness of problems and how to deal with them:-

Ah think [younger miners] have received some kind o' historical knowledge. They've done that through alot o' reasons but one reason, ah think, is because the Union itsel has had journals and periodicals, and things like that. And it's sortae promoted this idea o' historical belanging, ye ken. That "This went on in the past. People fought fur it and changed it. This is gaeing on just noo, and if we fight fur it we can change it." If ye want tae dae something ye have tae know about the past. Ye have tae know what happened before so that ye can decide what tae dae tae change the fu'ure.

This quotation is crucial for it shows us in a practical way how, in relation to the arguments in Chapter Three, the miners use their position within the historical present to draw upon a significant history of struggle to affect their future. The Union serves to help miners place themselves within the past/present/future continuum and draw upon that to engage actively in future possibilities. Thus, through Union education a particularistic legacy is reproduced and identity is instilled



yet, at the same time, it teaches miners that they are purposive; that the miners can alter their world. Such ideas have also been advanced through the Union schools which ran from nationalisation up until the 1984-85 strike. For young miners, often entering the pits with few, if any, formal qualifications, the two-week schools provided a means of educating members, and through this strengthening the Union itself. One 26 year old ex-communist explains how the Perth school encouraged him to participate more fully in the Union:-

It was actually [because] ah'd been up tae Perth at the Salutational Hotel. We had two-week schools. Ah'd been two years on the trot. And fra' then, that's what opened the door sortae thing. Ye know, the school. And ah'm no' the best o' readers and that. Ah think talking's alot be'er, ye know. Ah think maybe ma reasons were a bit touchy but it was the only way o' learning.

Yet if such mechanisms facilitate the socialisation of the young into their Union, one must also examine the nature and direction politicisation takes within the Scottish leadership; that is, one must uncover the political leaning of the leadership which permeates the Area. But, further, one must also determine the attitudes of the miners to that leadership as personalities in order to reveal the extent to which the rank and file are likely to internalise the message through the identification with those from whom it emanates.

The political direction of the Scottish Area can, perhaps, most clearly be seen through the party membership of its Presidents, of which there have been four. These are Abe and Alec Moffat, from Lumphinnans in Fife, Mick McGahey and George Bolton, all members of the Communist Party. This is not to say that other political parties have no voice within the Union, for there is a tacit agreement that the Executive Committee should reflect a balance of Communist and Labour Party members, yet it superficially indicates the tone of the Scottish Area. More importantly, the character of leadership has traditionally been such that they are accorded legitimacy by the rank-and-file. A 50 year old Labour Party



member supports this:-

Gaeing back fra', ken, early on in this century, the miners formed the Union. They had verra bad conditions, verra low wages. So ye had tae ha' staired it. There was people came tae the front that was sick o' suffering and being in poverty, and they came oot tae fight tae get a higher wage fra' it, and it all stemmed fra' there. Characters. Great trade-unionists, [who've] really got personalities, like, ken. Ye dinnae get them come along an awfy lot, ah don't think. It's like every other walk o' life, ken. But there are ayeways characters who'll stick in yur mind, ken. Och, they could hug a crowd. They could hug a crowd o' men, ken, at a mee'ing. And they could talk about onything, ken. They tell me Mick McGahey, ye could put him doon at a table wi' all yur politicians, the best politicians. Yur presidents, kings, queens, and Mick McGahey is one o' the best orators in the land. And he's, ken, a debater, that's the point ah'm trying tae make. He could debate aboot a thing, and he lost the rest, ye ken. And he's got it all [up] here. And Mick McGahey was just a miner and all, see. Son o' a miner. And he got educated through gaeing tae a library and reading books, and then the trade-union movement brought him on. But he ayeways had it. He had it because he was interested, and that's the point ah'm trying tae make. If ye've really got what ye're fighting fur in [yur hairt], ye'll ayeways fight fur the rights o' yur fellow man instead o' "Gi' me this. Gi' me that fur masel." Ye're gaeing tae gae oot, and ye're gaeing tae put the best case forrad fur yur membership. And that's what that man's done all his warking life. Ah've got tae say this, that Mick McGahey could ha' been retired, because he's no' in the best o' health, but that man stayed on purely tae try and get the victimised miners back tae their rightful place where they should be, at their wark.

Several interesting indications come from this quotation which highlight the basis of Union loyalty in the qualities of good leadership, and through this focus our attention on the value system of the miners. Firstly, we can see that the perception of a good leader is one who is committed to the cause of the miners and who, therefore, is worthy of trust. Such value judgements reflect those derived from the necessities of work underground; that is, they refer to the necessity of being trusted to stand by, and do one's best for, one's fellows. Leaders who manifest this general obligation can consequently broaden their appeal beyond their own political party members to all miners for they are held to have the qualities demanded of a good miner, and have the best interests of the collectivity at heart. As such, the fundamental



appeal of a leader must tie into the basis of the lived experience of rank-and-file members.

Further, there is a sense in which they must 'be more' than the ordinary miner, and that they must be prepared to give more than others. This is raised in various ways. Firstly, it is mentioned in relation to McGahey's self-sacrifice in staying on as President despite ill-health. Secondly, the quotation highlights the respect for articulacy and learning, which enables a leader to take on, and beat perhaps, those of greater position and privilege, and thus also encapsulates qualities which are extra-ordinary. It is in this sense that a good Union leader is the David that defeats Goliath: it is a verbal blow for the working man. It allows the miners to feel equal to anyone in that another miner has shown himself capable of such a task. Yet this draws attention to another quality raised in that, in all other ways, Mick is 'just' another miner, and therefore is part of a collectivity with whom he shares an identity of interests; that is, that there is, nevertheless, a unity between the rank-and-file and their leaders.

This is not to say that no Union leader has his faults, nor that there have not been those who are seen as having betrayed the trust of the miners. What the above quotation does indicate is the key values held to be important attributes for the miners' leaders, and of which leaders are ideal personifications. Men like Mick McGahey, who gain a great following among the Scottish miners, are seen as closely following the characteristics of a 'master status' by which a leader is judged. A good leader, rising from the ranks, is therefore part-man part-hero and worthy of respect. He is the manifestation in human form of the values accredited by the community. He is what Weber would call a 'charismatic' leader; an exceptional person who gains a personal following through holding the trust of his followers[7]. Leadership therefore fulfils two roles. It allows identification with the Union through the individual representatives, and



represents an ideal standard of values deemed worthy by the miners.

The quality of leadership historically among the Scottish Area can therefore be seen as a vital ingredient in the ability of the Union to win support among its members, through identification and example. Yet whilst this serves to place the Fife miners within the national context, one must also look to the locality, for it is here that experience of the Union can crucially affect the strength of identification and support.

#### 6.4 The Fife Union.

As we have seen in Chapter Two, and shall be explored more fully in a later chapter, the Fife Union has historically been able to produce and reproduce a radical stance. As a permanent organisation, the FKCMA predates the national Union, having been established in 1870[8]. It was in Fife that the fiercest Union activities took place in the inter-war years[9], and this solidarity has lived on through the disputes of the 1970s and the 1984-85 strike. This strength can largely be understood in terms of a strong base within the local communities due to the role of Union activists. For whilst the Union is regarded as strong at national level, it is the distinctly local considerations of Union activity in rendering coherent and dealing with the life experiences of the miners that is the most cogent force in translating occupational and communal collectivism into industrial organisation. Rather than give an objective history of the Fife Union, therefore, attention shall be focused on the meanings this has for those experiencing it.

In the last chapter we saw the historical solidarity of the mining communities, yet it was the Union which was a vital force in unifying these communities. A retired miner recalls the role of the Fife Union under private ownership:-

... we had a strong base because our trade-union leaders would come along and they would say, even on the basis of the 1933



strike, even when the soup-kitchens were in the villages, ye had the trade-union boys who would come along and say, "If yoo've got something, and yur next-door neighbour hasnae, yoo ha' it wi' him." They instilled intae ye what's his is yurs, and comradeship has got tae be seen tae be warking, ye know. They held public mee'ings and they said, "Look, we've all got tae stick together here. We've got tae fight this thing. Ah know that yes are all stervin'. Ah know that ye've got nothing tae put on the bairns' feet. But we'll get ye the Means Test. We'll get ye the claes. We'll get ye the shoes," and things like that. And that is the basis o' what ye cry a strang trade-union movement within a particular area.

Industrial organisation, therefore, grew out of the interaction between Union and community through the practical everyday activities of local leaders in supporting and assisting the mining population at home as well as at work. For those activists brought-up within the greater hardship of private ownership, the direct experience of Union support at this time led to their own involvement and activism. The next quotation from a 64 year old Labour Party member relates how familial hardship brought him to realise the importance of the Union, and shows us clearly how Union involvement in everyday life was a 'natural' part of the mining villages of this period:-

[Ah became active] through ma feyther's accident and some o' the actions between the employers and the ald Compensation Board. Ah was just a young lad and ah knew ma dad was lying, couldnae dae onything. Ma mother had a great responsibility because there were 5 o' us, and she had tae gae each thursday tae collect her compensation, 29/9d. That's what she got fur tae keep 5 o' us. 29/9d. That was the workman's compensation at that time. And she went doon one day and [ma feyther] had tae gae before a Board and the local doctor said that he couldnae gae, the Board would need tae come tae him because he was paralysed. So ah was aff school one day and ah went doon wi' her tae the Colliery Office tae collect her compensation. And the cashier, who was no' a verra pleasant man, who was typical o' the ald coal-owners' cashiers. Verra, verra disturbing type o' person. And he said, "There's nae money here fur ye. The money's stopped." So ma mother says, "And what am ah gaeing tae dae?" Ye know, ah could see the plight in her face. He says, "Ah don't care what ye dae," he says. "All ah'm here tae tell ye is that there's nae money fur ye." She says, "Where can ah gae?" He says, "Ye gae where ye like." So we walked back up this half mile road up tae the village again, and she was crying all the way, ye know, she was really upset. Onyway, we turned tae gae intae the village and here was this ald man, who was Secretary o' the Miners' Union, was coming walking doon. And he says, "Hello, Mrs.



\_\_\_\_," he says. "Hoo's yur husband keeping?" So she broke doon, ye know, and she tellt him, and ah assisted tae tell the man. He says, "Well, look. Just leave it wi' me," he says. "And ah'll gae. Ah understond what's happened. It's this Board," he says. "Ah'll gae up and see this gentleman that has the Post Office. He's also a Parish Councillor." And he went up and saw him. So the two o' them came up tae the hoose and he says, "Well, Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_. We'll gi' ye assistance fra' the Parish Relief until such times as ah get the opportunity tae resolve this. But," he says. "Whatever ye dae, don't worry," he says. "Ah went tae the local Co-op and ye're guaranteed tae get yur messages and everything. Ah've arranged that ye'll get them on account," he says. "This will be a' right. The money'll come eventually and we'll clear the ma'er up. But," he says. "The only thing ah want ye tae dae is don't worry," he says. "Somebody'll be oot tomorrow and ye'll get yur money and that will get yur immediate things, and then we'll get this thing cleared up." And as ah got alder ah thought, "There was an uncaring man who didnae gi' a damn what was happening tae the femily," and ah knew he knew the circumstances. He knew because ma feyther was maimed in the pit. "He knew the circumstances but he was uncaring. And there was a man who was caring." So ah couldnae pass that man withoot saying, "Hello, Mr. Hammond," everytime ah passed him. So ye could say it was a personal action that took me [tae the Union].

As this man got older and went into the pits it was the Union Secretary who encouraged him both towards union involvement and a position within the Labour Party. This looking out for young men of potential ability is a phenomenon which appears repeatedly among men who have become activists; that is, that they were initially taken under the wing of older men. This picture is especially clear in the case of miners who, like, the above man, had fathers who were either dead or incapacitated, for in such circumstances the Union became a 'communal father' to the family; providing support, assistance and advice to the dependents of fellow workers who could not provide these things themselves. Sons of such families would not, therefore, necessarily follow in their own father's political footsteps, as we saw occurs in a previous chapter, but tend to have followed the path of the 'communal father'.

This role as communal leaders was spread over the whole community more generally also. As activists and spokesmen the Union representatives dominated both pit and village, acknowledged due



to their involvement in daily problems. An anecdote from a 73 year old communist describes both this general role of the Union, and indicates how it acted to represent his family specifically, his father having died:-

The Union domina'ed the village life. Ah'll gi' ye an illustration, and this was just during a strike but it happened aye the time. Ye see, there's a fallacy created by the middle class that the general practitioner and the school teacher is the confidante o' the warking class. Absolute bluidy rubbish! The doctor keeps yoo at a distance, and yoo keep him at one, and so daes the school teacher and so forth, at least in ma era. It ye wanted advice ye went tae the Union representative in the village. Whether he was Delegate or Secretary didnae ma'er. If he was on the Union Commi'ee, that's where ye went.... The Union played the dominant role in running the village. Fur example, aifter ma feyther died early in the 1926 strike, the manager allowed them at the pit. There was a great piece o' flat groond where there had been a bing that had been levelled oot at the pit-heid, and the men were digging holes doon quite deep and ge'ing the coal oot that had been left. But when we went up, ma brother and ah, they wouldnae let us dig a hole because they knew we'd get buried because we didnae know what tae dae. But there was this great, big tree-trunk laying among the grass that we were surprised that naebody had sawn-up, because all the trees had been sawn-up roond aboot, and all the spare wood and everything had been all taken away. So we had this wee hatchet, and we painstakingly took aboot two nights tae saw this thing up and carted it hame and put it in the coal-cellar. Well, a day or so later the bell came roond the village. ye know, they rang the bell. Even in this village when we were mairried it was still done. Ye went arond ringing the bell and saying, "A mee'ing will be held in the Institute tonight," or the streetcorner. In this case it had tae be the streetcorner because they wanted the whole village tae turn oot. And it ha' turned oot that somebody had sawn-up a telegraph pole. We never realised it was a telegraph pole because we forgot there's so much o' a telegraph pole in the groond. This seemed so much bigger than a telegraph pole. And they were then deciding that every hoose in the village was tae be searched. And every hoose in the village was searched. Every hoose. Under the bed and everywhere. Until they found the telegraph pole stuck in \_\_\_'s coal shed. So that gi's ye an example o' the discipline in the village. Everybody opened their doors and the Union Commi'ee walked in and searched the hooses. We had tae appear before the Strike Commi'ee. They just looked at us. Jock Miller told the other loddies. "What are we gaeing tae dae?" Ald Jock says, "Nothing." Nothing they could dae. Gae up and apologise tae the manager, and tell him what happened, then all get back tae the bing again.



Yet if leadership and communal discipline were vital to this unity, it also relied heavily upon the numerical strength and outlooks of the Fifiers, upon which militancy could be built by Union leaders. One retired Labour Party member argues:-

Ye had a strang Union base predominantly because mining in Fife was on a greater scale than ony other pairt o' Great Britain. At one time, in Fife, we employed in the region o' 30,000-odd men, in the mining industry. Noo, if ye take that on a proportional basis because Fife, global-wise, is just a small area compared to, what, the North Yorkshire, or No'inghamshire or South Wales. Ye know, we're just a small island, we're surrounded by wa'er on 3 sides, and we're cut-aff economically by a 3 bridge system, as ye know it noo. But predominantly we've ayeways been a close-knit mining communi'y, and we had people who warked in the mining industry who instilled that sortae militancy gaeing back tae the Gallacher days.

These quotations are interesting in that they show how work, industrial organisation and communal living were strongly interconnected within the mining villages of the past, which facilitated the development of strong identity and collective attitudes. Yet the withdrawal of the pits from the villages with the advent of closures and larger, cosmopolitan productive units has served to divorce the Union, in many ways, from the immediacy of everyday life. In such circumstances, it may have become harder to instill Union attitudes and loyalty among younger generations of miners.

As we have seen the Union's educational programmes and publications are an important socialising agent among younger miners, providing them with both a sense of identity and new types of ideas. Yet, at the local level, there is still a major role played by leaders in encouraging younger men, as we saw occurred in the past. One unaligned 26 year old activist explains how he became involved:-

... there was a guy called Bob Young who thought [ah was] really interested. And aifter ah had attended a few branch mee'ings ah was told about the Sco'ish Youth Commi'ee, and he asked me if ah would be interested in gaeing fur a position on the Youth Commi'ee, which ah did.



The Scottish Youth Committee plays a central role in educating the younger men in the ways of the Union, and it is from this initial involvement that many local officials have gone on to other Union positions. Yet if this example shows a conscious effort to involve miners in the Union, often it would seem that it is informal socialisation within the family that lays the basis for later involvement and interest. A 30 year old branch Secretary of SCEBTA argues:-

Ah think ma mother and feyther gave me the basics, and the communi'y ah belanged in gave me the basics tae. But it's verra much up tae yursel whether ye grasp that, ye ken, and ye realise, fur instance, "We could change things if we dae cer'ain things. If we get people involved. Life's no' ayeways gaeing tae be like this." So, in a sense, ma mother and feyther gave me the basics, ye ken, but it's like onything else wi' trade-union wark it's haird wark, and ye've got tae wark haird at it, ye ken.

This fundamental outlook may then be channelled by the Union into active participation, encouraged by both the orientation of the Union and the sense that activism can produce results. The same young man continues:-

When ye wark in an industry where the Union is quite strang, where there is a tradition, a historic tradition o' militancy in the workplace, where ye can actually feel that ye're daeing something. That if ye take a decision ye can cairry it oot, and ye can take the necessary steps tae bring aboot change. Well, we wark in that industry, and ah felt, verra early on, that ah could become pairt o' that. That ah could verra easily become pairt o' a process in bringing aboot change fur the guid within the industry. And that's why ah decided tae gae tae Union mee'ings and take up different positions in the Union.... ah think the miners' Union is a wee bit unique, in the sense that we've come through alot o' struggle and we've won alot o' advances. And we've took alot o' defeats, but ye learn fra' yur defeats. And we've saw in the workplace alot o' changes that's happened because the Union's pressured and won things. So it's mair visible in the mining industry.

This quotation serves to indicate a trend that seems to be dominant among the younger generation; that is, that the workplace now occupies a more central role in encouraging the young in a period when the centrality of the mining villages has been eclipsed. However, it also shows us how knowledge of past



activities may engender activism by emphasising potentiality for action in the future. It stresses the dynamic aspects of human behaviour; that actors are capable of knowledgeable practices to change their world. Yet this knowledge is also particularistic in that it places that capability within conflict; that miners must struggle to gain concessions within their industry. It is for this reason that younger miners, both radical and unaligned, echo the words of previous generations when they make statements such as this next one:-

[The history o' the Fife miners] is a history o' struggle, basically. That's it in one sentence. It's a history o' struggle. The struggles will **change**, they'll take different turnings, and they'll take different dimensions, but there will **ayeways** be struggle.

However, whilst the previous discussion has focused on the meaning of the Union largely for active membership, and the ways in which the Union has been able to engender activism and loyalty amongst its members both at national and local level, this strength has crucially depended upon numerical and communal strength fortified, as has been discussed in an earlier chapter, by the perception of a distinctive Fife identity. In present times the decline of the industry and communities is seen as undermining this. Thus, Fife's historic strength is now regarded as being placed under severe threat as declining numbers have eroded potential Union effectiveness. By 1984, as we have seen, Fife pits accounted for 6,161 miners out of a Scottish coalfield total of 14,011. Of this figure 2,953 were employed at the Longannet Complex, formally outwith Fife and including men from other areas. The total for Fife pits exclusively was thus 3,208. The miners perceive that this has critically weakened their Union. A 45 year old politically-unaligned man comments:-

Well, we'll never be as strang as that again. Och, ye're talking aboot that time maybe we had 30,000 miners. It's sad when ye think o' the amount o' people, even when ah entered the industry, tae what's left. It's just a pittance left. Ken, ye're talking aboot, as ah say, roughly 30,000 miners, and noo we're doon tae hundreds, literally. And it's sad tae think o' it in that way. Alot o' jobs lost. Och, we'll never



be like that again. So ye cannae have the same effect, ye see. Ye cannae have the same power.

Objective decline, therefore, is largely seen as responsible for a diminishing power on the part of the Union. Yet this is not perceived purely in terms of the steady drop in the number of local pits and jobs but also in relation to the larger qualitative effect that this socio-economic change has had upon the miners. We have already discussed the rundown of local communities and the subsequent greater susceptibility of the miners to wider societal influence that this has engendered. This is seen as affecting the Union in two major ways: quality of membership and the effects of this on leadership potential.

The increase of individualistic attitudes among the miners is perceived to have affected the traditional loyalty to the Union. As we saw in the last chapter this is related to the greater affluence that miners currently enjoy, compared to the conditions of past generations, and it is linked to the political climate of the 1980s which legitimates individualistic orientations. Such changes, both subjective and objective, are of concern to the miners in that they are seen as having a debilitating effect on the Union, in that the men are less prepared to stand collectivistically. A retired unaligned man in his 60s argues:-

If we had that movement noo on the same strength and basis as what they were prepared to give up then, we would ha' nothing tae worry about. But we dinnae ha' that noo. We're in a si'uation noo, "Ah'm a' right, Jack, tae heck wi' the rest o' yoos."

If the rank-and-file are seen as less solid, this is also perceived to be reflected in the leadership of the Union, both nationally and locally. There is a common perception amongst miners of different political leanings and age, that contemporary leadership is of lesser stature and commitment than in the past. A Labour Party man in his 50s comments:-

... at the present day ah cannae say that, in ma opinion anyway, ah dinnae see one Mick McGahey, like, in Scotland, in the likes o' George Bolton. At local level, ah cannae say



that ah've seen onybody near resembling them. That's ma honest opinion. They dae their best but there's nae **characters** as such, as yur Abe Moffats, and yur Mick McGaheys and that.

Those coming to leadership at both levels are not held to hold the same qualities as in the past. Thus, when discussing such men, there is not the characterisation of them as having those features which characterised the 'master status' discussed earlier. Rather than being prepared to commit themselves and fight for the miners at all costs, they are seen as more opportunistic and individualistic. One young Labour Party member in his 30s argues:-

Ah don't know whether its people aifter careers raither than oot tae help their fellow men, [but] ah think when they gain positions they dinnae want tae upset the applecart. They're no' wanting tae take up the challenge.

This perception of qualitative difference can be found among older men also. An 87 year old founder-member of the CPGB supports the above statement:-

And ye often hear, "Christ, \_\_\_\_\_. There arenae fellas like what yoo were, and Abe Moffat and Alec Campbell. They're no' here the day. They're no' here." And they say tae men, och, a **number** o' times, people in the street, "There's nae folk like yoo and Alec Campbell, and Abe Moffat, and Bob Selkirk, and Mrs. Stewart, and Jock Bird and all them. There's nae fellas like that noo. They're no' prepared tae dae it. They've all got different conditions and they're no' prepared tae dae what yoo boys did and sacrifice yur lives. Because that's what yooos ha' done." And tae a cer'ain extent it's true. It's true.

This decline, which here is related to changing industrial and social conditions which have eroded the material base of the miners' lives, is thereby held to have altered the outlooks of Union members and consequently the Union itself. Such perceptions of the leadership, however, in the light of earlier discussion, may not necessarily reflect actuality, but do express the grave concerns among the miners that their strength is waning; that is, that they are worried that the values traditionally embodied within the industry are under attack. Yet whilst these issues are



tied to the current political climate which affects those remaining in the industry, there can still be found a belief that the nature of employment can militate against this trend. A young unaligned 24 year old argues:-

They're affected by what's happening outside. People become within theirselves because the whole Thatcher thing is isolation fra' yur neighbour and that. An individualistic thing, ye see. And that can happen. But in the pit, ah mean, ye're warking in close accord wi' people, ye see. It's no' just got the same effect as ah can imagine its got in other places.

Consequently, whilst historical change may be undermining traditional strengths and values, there is also a perception that, at a fundamental level, these can never be wholly eroded due to the nature of the work.

#### 6.5 Conclusion.

In this chapter we have seen how the miners regard their Union, and the grounding of these attitudes within actuality the pit; that is, how orientations towards the organisation of labour reflect the prerequisites of the work experience. However, although attitudes reflect the basis of the miners' experiences in an immediate sense, more formally, beliefs and identity are formed on two levels; through the activities of the Union at both a local and a national level in mobilising the miners' and encouraging activism. Both levels act to reinforce each other.

Thus, as we have seen, whilst it appears to be the case that family and/or communal background may predispose miners towards solidaristic attitudes and behaviour, this has been actively shaped by the activities of the miners' Union, both locally and nationally, over time. Local leaders have shaped developments within the communities and groomed young miners, who have then been encouraged to participate within the Union, and educated at a national level; both at educational schools and through the experience gained from the Youth Committee or other Union positions. In this way, the politicisation of successive



generations has been enabled. Yet in addition to this socialising role, the Union forms the focal point for identity with the collectivity, and, through the personification of leaders as master statuses, is an embodiment of key values in the miners' lives. In relation to the work of Hamilton and Gallie, therefore, it would appear that both positions hold true; that is, that whilst miners may come to the Union with ideas already formed in relation to actuality, this is then further systematised by the Union's educative role.

But further, the Union has been active in instilling a mining identity based upon historical, as well as political, knowledge, which serves to locate the miners in time and show their potential to affect their lives. Knowledge of the Union in the past helps place individuals within a radical tradition, and, in so doing, engenders values and orientations which then act to reproduce the radical consciousness. This knowledge helps, therefore, to create an identity with miners of the past, and locates the men within the temporal continuum.

Yet the decline of the industry has had crucial effects on the strength of the Union, and appears to have weakened the potentiality to continue this socialisation, at all levels. Locally, the communal decline and increasingly cosmopolitan nature of the Fife pits has, to some extent, removed the Union from the immediacy of everyday life, and thus lessened its dominance over the lives and beliefs of the miners. Nationally, a reduced manpower has weakened the miners' objective strength, and financial standing; thereby reducing its ability to engage on major socialising campaigns. However, the strength of the Union is in many ways a relative phenomenon, crucially dependent upon those forces against which it must operate; namely, management. It is thus to this aspect that attention must be turned in order adequately to assess the contemporary position of the Union.



## CHAPTER SEVEN.

## ... AND MANAGEMENT AND MEN.

7.1 Introduction.

In Chapter One we saw that in Lockwood's typification of the proletarian traditionalist, the characterising form of social awareness was one of a dichotomous power model wherein 'they' stood in harsh differentiation to 'us'. This, he argued, was due to the collectivistic attitudes formed by occupational and communal solidarity, and was based in a close relationship between fellow workers. The clearcut sense of identity at the levels of work, community and union that we have examined in the previous chapters should consequently act to engender an oppositional attitude to industrial relations if such a model can be held to be accurate. In this sense, the experiences of power relations at work for the miners may act potentially as a mechanism for the reinforcement of the particularistic identity and patterns of belief, by sharpening distinctions of miners and non-miners in relation to work situations. The work of both Hamilton and Gallie is again of specific interest in this regard.

Hamilton argues that it is among radical workers that one can best find oppositional attitudes which would accord with those found in Lockwood's model. These centre around suspicion and hostility towards management practices associated with social distance between management and workers, and a lack of legitimacy accorded to management based upon perceptions of incompetence and waste. Such attitudes, he argues, are to be found in greater evidence among radicals for they are founded within their political beliefs as developed by their unions[1].

Gallie's arguments surrounding the role of management lays emphasis instead on the actual relations with management rather than on the perceptual orientations of workers. In his study he found that the organisation of French companies helped develop



oppositional attitudes among workers by virtue of managerial authoritarianism, in that these fostered the growth of work grievances. Thus, bad relations between workers and management, in Gallie's work, are based upon explicitly disciplinary forms of social relations at work, rather than the perception of these in terms of political beliefs. He argues:-

... a more authoritarian structure of managerial power should be associated with more intense work grievances and a closer association between work grievances and attitudes to class inequality[2].

He would thus agree with the work of Touraine, which argues that class consciousness is most evident in French industries such as mining and heavy engineering which are characterised by greater managerial control[3]. Gallie discusses four areas of grievance which he believes are of particular importance. Firstly, he identifies the area of decision-making practices in French companies, where he states that workers found that decisions were unilaterally imposed upon them, and that they were not given a voice in making decisions, or discussing budgets, investments etc.. Consequently, the power structures of the workplace were regarded as illegitimate. Secondly, grievances focused around bad social relations with management, who were not regarded as interested in workers' opinions. The last two areas concerned practical arrangements; that is, the work organisation and payment systems.

Again, as with Hamilton's work, we can see that poor perceptions of management, relating to power structures at work, are a crucial source of work grievance. Yet Gallie argues that such attitudes could be found not only among workers committed to radical political beliefs but among all workers. He concludes from this that it is the social relations of work themselves which are important to ideas about social inequality, rather than these expressing radical beliefs already held. He states:-

In general, the view of theorists of institutionalisation that a more authoritarian structure of management within a firm is likely to lead to industrial grievances feeding into wider



social radicalism... would appear to receive significant support from the evidence we have been examining. The hierarchical structure of the French firm would appear to lead both to higher levels of industrial grievance and to the generalisation of these grievances into more diffuse class resentment[4].

These work grievances, formed by the occupational experience, are thus more important than exposure to radical ideologies, Gallie would argue, and can be found through-out the workforce irrespective of political alignment.

Whilst, in the previous chapter, we sought to understand the foundations for Union loyalty among the miners, in this chapter, therefore, we seek to analyse the ways in which workers' experiences of management and their perceptions of managerial attitudes may act as a mechanism in the formation of an oppositional consciousness; that is, to understand beliefs in relation to external, rather than internal, factors. In relation to the work of Hamilton and Gallie this examination must reveal whether, should conflictual perceptions exist among the miners, this is to be found only among radical workers or among the entire workforce. Yet it is important to locate this within a dynamic framework which can trace the developments within the mining industry and help to uncover how a significant history may affect contemporary miners' beliefs and attitudes towards their employers. It is through the analysis of such issues that one can uncover the extent to which Lockwood's conceptualisation of a dichotomous model of social relations holds true, and if it does so over time.

## 7.2 Nationalisation: A 'New' Industry?

Of the sample interviewed, all but one have worked primarily under the National Coal Board; the exception being a founder-member of the Communist Party in his late 80s who was black-listed from the Fife pits whilst they were still under private ownership and never found work in the industry again. Of the remaining 39 only 10 had worked prior to nationalisation, the oldest having started just



after the General Strike, and the youngest entering the pits in 1939. Thus the nationalised industry forms the major experience of work in the pits for the miners interviewed. This chapter, therefore, will seek to concentrate on the perception of changing relations associated with the inception of nationalisation, and how these have progressed over time. Central to this is whether the miners' attitudes to management can be viewed as oppositional in tone, and what this perception of management means to miners.

For both young and old miners the years of private ownership are seen, as we have already discovered, as typified by harsh and bad conditions in both the pits and the communities. Corresponding to this, industrial relations at that time are seen as governed by a authoritarianism in managerial approach which acted to deprive the mining population of self-determinism, being at the will of the owners, and of an adequate standard of living. All age groups see the past as characterised by an intense antagonism between owners and their managers and the men. One 62 year old Labour Party member explains this period in comparison to the early years of nationalisation:-

Well, the most important change, as far as ah was concerned was when nationalisation came in because ye then had a system whereby men were paid a wage according tae their ability, and also it set them in a si'uation whereby they could plan their ain lifestyle, in relation tae whether they wished tae take on hire-purchase, on the basis that they knew a wage was coming in, ye know. Ah mean, prior tae nationalisation coming in the coal bosses determined whether a man suited their needs or otherwise. Just tae gi' an example, when ah staired in Blairhall there used tae be a queue o' men waiting on jobs being allocated tae them. And ah've seen as much as a hundred men standing ootside the manager's office. And a manager would come oot, and he didnae take them as he stood, he picked them as per their height or size, or whatever. In other wards, there was a sense o' injustice in relation tae the [fact] that a man couldae been standing fur two or three days, waiting on a job, but if his face didnae suit, he didnae get the job.... Ye were in a sortae market-place, yur labour was there tae be bought.

This quotation indicates the ways in which the old system of ownership was felt to demean the dignity of the miners, and also shows the perceived injustice of the owners' actions. The men



felt themselves to have little control over their lives, and no voice in decision-making within their industry. It was the lack of control which may be regarded as one of the main reasons that the miners had been calling for nationalisation of their industry from the late nineteenth century. When vestment day came on 1st January 1947, there was, therefore, a belief that a new and better future lay in store for the miners and that the days of conflict which had marked the industry in Fife in the inter-war years would be exchanged for both greater material benefits and an enhanced position within the industry's power structure in order to secure the industry's future. The miners' would at last be accorded 'decent moral treatment'. This belief that management and men could work together is expressed by a retired miner in his 60s:-

Ye had what ye cried a sense o' purpose. Ye felt that yoo were being involved in the industry, whereas before ye were only there in a sortae slave si'uation, if ye want tae put it that way.... There was really nae comparison [in terms o' industrial relations], because there was a new emphasis in relation tae when ye went tae negotiate. Previously, under the coal owners, if ye refused what he said then ye didnae get the job. It was as straight forrad as that. If he said, "Ye're stairting on the night-shift," and yoo said, "Ah cannae because ma wife's no' keeping well," or "Ah've cer'ain reasons why ah cannae wark night-shifts." Ye know, he just says, "Well, ye'll just have tae look fur a job someplace else." It was as simple and straight-forrad as that. They didnae take reasons. And if he said that ye were gaeing tae be paid, say, 15/- fur brushing, and yoo said, "Och, but ah cannae live aff that. Ah've got 5 in ma femily, and that only makes such-and-such or such-and-such." He says, "Take it or leave it." Whereas when nationalisation came in, what happened then was that ye had what ye cried "trade-union representation". Don't get me wrang, there were trade unions as far as the coal owners were concerned, but they were being dictated tae b' the coal owners. Whereas, when nationalisation came in, the unions and management warked on the basis that, "This is noo a nationalised industry, we've got tae wark together." In other wards, it was based on the principle that every one o' us were warking fur each other. It didnae ma'er whether ye were the manager o' the pit or whether ye were on the pit-heid.

This early belief in a new harmony was compounded by the new agreements and consultative procedures between management and the unions, which encouraged miners to believe that the industry did, indeed, belong to the people. These new benefits were enhanced by



technological change also, which was removing much of the arduous nature of the work, and by the new guidelines in work-practices and payment systems which gave a greater sense of security. A retired Labour Party member argues:-

... they saved the men an awfy lot o' haird, strenuous wark because prior tae ye ge'ing, say, a haulage tae draw the tubs, ye had tae man-handle these.... [And] they warked [the coal] on a cubic capacity basis. They would say, "Right. Everybody will have 364 cubic feet, and ye'll be paid accordingly when ye strip that particular amount o' groond. When that is done, what ye ha' earned is yurs." What happened prior tae that is, ye know, before nationalisation came in, if ye didnae complete ye didnae know just exactly hoo much ye were gaeing tae get bonded tae ye. Ye were only paid a proportion. Ye were paid on a proportional basis. Whereas, when nationalisation came in ye knew what ye were gaeing tae be paid fur a particular job. So there was a job description, and the job evaluation was done in relation tae that. Ye noo knew what was expected o' ye, and that was it.

This quotation indicates how the nationalised industry introduced a bureaucratic rationality into the industry which, no longer under the control of the varying different local owners operating by different criterion, enabled miners to feel a greater control over their lives. In the wake of such perceptions of change, much of the previous opposition and hostility towards management in the privatised years began to decline. This appears to be the case even among radicals. One 75 year old communist describes the difference in the early years of nationalisation:-

... nationalisation, at the beginning, gave miners a kindae relationship tae the management, that had been extremely antagonistic before. So ye had a new kind o' a relationship wi' management in which ye didnae regaird them as the enemy. Because o' the na'ure o' mining under the coal owners, and the separation o' the managerial staff in the pit - like firemen, gaffers, under-managers, managers, agents - they were all regairded as the enemy [under private ownership].

There was felt to be the possibility of a reconciliation from the late 1940s among the Fife miners as with the coalfield as a whole. As Allen claims:-

The vesting day was on 1st January, 1947. It was a great day for miners. Through nationalisation the miners saw a real possibility of planning the resources of the industry to



provide job security as well as improved wages and working conditions in a manner consistent with increasing efficiency. Indeed nationalisation stood as the antithesis of all the conditions which free competition had created and which ordinary miners suffered. So for most miners the 1st January, 1947 was the beginning of a new era in which the mines belonged to the nation and, in consequence, to the miners themselves. Uncertainty was, it was believed, at an end[5].

The industry, therefore, was entering a new era in which 'consensus' was the key word. The two sides of management and unions would work together. To quote a statement made by Derek Ezra in the 1970s, then Chairman of the NCB:-

Over the years... although both sides have never forgotten that they represent the interests of the wage earner on the one hand, and the interests of management on the other, the relationship has been largely harmonious especially when it comes to matters like coordinating policy.... I would say that consultative arrangements with the union are as advanced as in any industry in the world. The members of our union - who are our work people - are in constant touch with what management is doing[6].

Yet it has been argued that much of this new harmony in industrial relations within the mining industry was the result largely of the NUM's determination that it should succeed, and that it was the preparedness of the Union to forgo further gains in order to ensure that the long-term future was secured, which enabled good relations to continue in the period up until the 1960s. Allen, for example, argues that the reasons for the conciliatory approach was because the miners "had great expectation and, in general, they were prepared to work in order to fulfil them[7]." This argument is supported by Jackson, who argues:-

The relations between the NUM and the NCB, in particular in the early years after nationalisation, were extremely good. The NUM gave a great deal of support to the NCB's efforts to deal with problems arising from the shortage of coal and it is doubtful whether the Coal Board could have achieved the degree of success it did without the union's help. The union's support for the NCB was undoubtedly largely a reflection of its support for the idea of nationalisation. The miners' union had pressed the case for nationalisation for about fifty years and was determined to do all it could to make sure that it worked and was seen to work. The miners' union was also encouraged to support NCB policy by the government, a Labour



Government which the miners had strongly supported in 1945 and for which they were willing to sacrifice a good deal[8].

Consequently, the early years were very much a 'honeymoon' period for the Board and Union, wherein, due to the desire to make nationalisation work, the Union threw its energies behind management rather than against management. It was a time when miners felt that they could participate in the running of the industry through their involvement in the Union, and, in this way, ensure benefits for their members. A Labour Party ex-miner recalls:-

Well, why ah wanted tae involve masel as an official in the mining industry was ah had, actually, seen masel under two types o' management. Under the ald coal owners ah felt ah was only there, personally, ah felt ah was a slave. In other wards, ye were dictated tae. Ah mean, ah know that there's ayeways got tae be a sense o' responsibility, and someone's got tae govern in the mining industry because it's a highly dangerous industry tae wark in, and that ye've got tae have management there tae dictate what the principles will be. But under the ald system it was so dictatorial that ye felt ye were being surpressed. So, when nationalisation come along ah decided, ah says, "Noo. Ah think ah would like tae be in wi' management in seeing hoo successful we can make this industry." So, therefore, the only way ye could dae that was on a consultation basis. So, therefore, if ye involved yursel in the trade-union movement, and ye've got the chance tae consult on a consultative basis wi' management, ye can suggest. And having suggested, yur ideas are brought together. And, having done that, we made alot o' progress. Because management in the mining industry, in the early pairt, and ah'm talking aboot when nationalisation came in furst, could see that the benefits were there.

As such, the evidence seems to contradict the accepted mythology of the miners' Union as one which is strongly antagonistic to management, for it would seem that the miners entered into a very close working relationship with the Board in order to secure the future of their industry. Yet one needs to determine how accurate this picture of a harmonious relationship between management and men really was. The inter-war period had been characterised by much conflict in the Fife coalfield, as in other areas of Britain, and so one must determine the extent to which this situation was really replaced by harmony from 1947. Further, it must been seen



in what ways the miners' determination that nationalisation should succeed may have actually worked against them in the long-term.

### 7.3 The Honeymoon Ends.

Although the early years show a willingness on the part of the Union to work with the Coal Board there were reservations about the new consensus. Whilst there had always been cynics about the extent of change that nationalisation would bring about, initially it had been believed, or hoped, that it would be a radically different industry. Yet even in the early 1950s doubts began to grow about the true extent of the miners' new benefits and control, which grew as closures picked up speed from 1958.

Jackson argues that one must focus attention on rank-and-file members rather than Union leaders for this indicates that whilst national officials gave support to the NCB the reaction among members was rather more complicated. This, he claims, was because nationalisation did not have the dramatic effects the miners had hoped for on their degree of control and working lives. He argues that there was an increased disenchantment of the miners from their leaders, and points to the number of unofficial strikes, although accepting that there may be other reasons than disenchantment to explain unofficial action, such as failure of the Union to get word of action in time. He supports his case by the argument that miners complained that although the NCB consulted the NUM about policy matters, the Union did not adequately consult the membership[9]. The prevalence of strikes in Fife during this period is attested to by a 47 year old unaligned miner:-

Ah would say it was mair militant in the past. Well, when ah warked at Glencraig, ah cannae mind, it wasnae verra often we had a full week, because there was always something fur a strike, ken. And ye had Lawrence Daly, ken, Wee Johnnie Stewart. Wee Johnnie's deid noo. They used tae stond on the dyke ootside the baths and say, "The pully wheel shall no' turn this morning." And they never did, and we were away hame again. Ah think it was just that the management and Union didnae get on and things boiled over. Ye see, ah was alot younger at that time, 15, 16, 17 years ald, and ah cannae



really remember all the things they went on strike fur, but we used tae be on strike alot o' times.

This quotation would appear to support Jackson's argument that Scotland soon demonstrated conflictual attitudes. He claims that the extent of such reactions differed around the coalfield for whilst in "Durham, Northumberland and the Midlands, the Board retained a lot of good will amongst individual miners for some while... in other areas, of which Scotland is probably the best example, the miners quickly showed their opposition[10]." It was not merely policies that were a source of discontent but also the issue of control. He believes that in certain areas the idea of 'worker control' had a considerable degree of support, of which Scotland was one. He argues:-

In Scotland, for example, one can find far more evidence of support amongst miners... for the notion of 'workers' control' than elsewhere. Miners' leaders in Scotland fairly consistently opposed, and still do oppose, the majority of their English counterparts over this matter[11].

Such sentiments can be found among the miners in the sample, who argue that it became increasingly apparent that control of the industry was not as much in their hands as they had initially hoped. One 51 year old redundant communist miner recalls the pervading atmosphere in the industry during his early working years:-

Ah think at that time, [1947], they did think it was oors. But when ah come intae the coal industry in 1952, there was becoming an awareness that it wasnae the nationalisation the ald boys had fought fur, or had dreamed aboot. The thing is there was still the same coal owners that had run the industry, the same form o' management. Fur the furst time warkers were saying, "It's oor industry," but they werenae allowed tae decide the planning, no' allowed tae decide hoo things were gaeing tae be run in general. There was a Consultative Committee set up which at one time, during the war ah understond, was the ald Production Committee that was set up tae look at problems. Because during the war, as ye can imagine, the Union were involved in pushing production fur the war effort. So, in effect, these Production Committees become the Consultative Committee. And it wasnae the kindae thing, fur example, when we'd won nationalisation, the ald boys were [expecting]. [They] were thinking at that time these Consultative Committees [would be] the Union, the



workers deciding what was gaeing tae happen. That didnae happen. And by the time ah joined the pit five years aifter nationalisation, there was then becoming the realisation that the kindae nationalisation they'd [got] wasnae the kindae nationalisation it shouldae been. But even then they were still saying, "This is be'er than before."

Thus, although changing work practices and procedures gave miners a greater control over their lives, nationalisation had not given them greater control over their industry. From the late 1950s, therefore, disenchantment among the miners appears to have been growing towards the new nationalised industry. There would appear to be three main reasons for this. Firstly, as has been seen above was the issue of the lack of workers' control. The second two factors are of a more practical nature, concerning the financial problems facing the NCB from this time as predicted market decline threatened to effect economic viability and the 'coal at any price' policy of the early years, and, secondly, the gathering momentum of pit closures in relation to this in the years after the publication of the NCB's Revised Plan for Coal in 1959, wherein were laid out the retrenchments for the coalfield.

If economic issues became of increasing concern to the NCB in the 1950s, the validity of their actions is called into question by older miners who believe that the nationalised industry had been handicapped from its inception due to the reparations paid to the old coal owners. There is a great sense of grievance that their industry did not stand a sporting chance because of payments to those who are regarded, firstly, as having financially exploited the miners for years [and having, in many cases, claimed large sums for rundown pits with outmoded equipment], and, secondly, to people who are seen as social oppressors. A retired Labour Party miner argues:-

Well, it lived up tae expectations in as much as that we had a say in the running o' the industry. But, ah don't think that they got their true rewards in relation tae what the industry achieved. Because the nationalised industry inherited quite alot o' debts wi' having tae pay aff the coal owners. Noo, that should never ha' happened. The coal owners had got a guid enough living fur a hundred years prior tae that, because they used men and women as slaves.... So, therefore, all the



estates and everything that they acquired was aff the bluid and sweat o' the people whom they had [exploited].

It was the issues of lower profitability than expected and the prediction of changing demand which were largely responsible for the second problem facing the miners in these years, that of pit closures. Initially, expanded production had been required in the attempts to reconstruct the economy in the post-war years, but declining markets, caused largely by the more efficient use of coal and the growth of alternative fuels, meant that the NCB had to cutback on production and investment. One communist in his 50s talks of the closure programme of that time:-

The change, ah think, began tae come at the end o' the '50s, early '60s. Ye could begin tae see a change then. Successive governments were trying on pit closures. In fact, Cowdenbeath Workshops, where ah warked, was earmarked fur closure in 1962! Alang wi' many o' the collieries. And that was fram a Labour government when Alf Robens was Chairman o' the Board. Ah think that programme, that lasted fra' the '60s tae the '70s was a mair profound pit closure programme than onything that MacGregor instituted, but because it was a Labour government warkers were convinced that it was in their best interests.

Evidence appears to indicate, therefore, that the picture of a 'Golden Age' of harmony between management and men is somewhat oversimplified. There appears to have been a widespread support for nationalisation on its inception yet this picture is contradicted by a continuing disaffection with management. Fife would appear to fit with Jackson's arguments that parts of the coalfield were typified by disillusionment and industrial action even in the early period. The comments of the men involved in the industry at this time indicate an awareness that they were not participating equally within decision-making, and the prevalence of unofficial strikes would imply that good relations were not a permanent feature of their interaction with local management. The crucial issues appear to be that nationalisation was not premised on socialist principles in the way that had been envisualised and that, consequently, the industry was still characterised by capitalist relations based on managerial authority. Put simply,



ownership did not equate to control. Such an idea is expressed by Manny Shinwell, who wrote of nationalisation:-

I will not accept that even the nationalised coal industry is consistent in structure and operations with Socialism. There are as many class distinctions and gradations in status, class and salaries in the nationalised coal industry as are found in Capitalist society. They have their bosses, only with other names. Doubtless the mining community has gained by public ownership. Improved working conditions, higher wages, more security; but if this is what is accepted as Socialism, I decline to endorse it[12].

As this quotation states, however, there were most certainly perceived benefits in terms of work and pay conditions in the pits. Yet despite this, two of Gallie's four points which he uses as signs of bad industrial relations, illegitimately-regarded power structures and bad social relations, appear to have been present even in the early years in Fife. In such circumstances, with the perceived failure of the industry to live up to expectations and the acceleration of pit closures one needs to discover why the period of the 1950s and 1960s are regarded as a period of relative calm by the miners.

Allen argues, and is borne out by earlier quotations from the miners, that it was the consensus ideology that was in some ways responsible for a continuing harmony, and also the belief that support must be given to the Labour government of 1945-1951:-

Miners were never free to stand aside from all of these pressures to assess what they were being told about themselves and their work. The explanations moreover, were rooted in the pressures and generally reinforced them. The complete ideological apparatus in society, especially the mass media, was utilised to appeal for responsibility, a commitment to the nation as a whole, an acceptance of consensus between classes[13].

Yet there was a greater awareness of problems in Scotland. Jackson argues that is because Scotland was one of the areas suffering most badly from industrial contraction, with the Area being cut from 85,600 to 48,100 between 1957-1965[14]. The effects of the cutbacks, he argues, were, however, eased by the



availability of transfers and alternative sources of employment in the early 1960s. This is supported by the comment of a 39 year old unaligned man:-

In the '60s there was plenty o' variation fur other jobs, ah would say. If ye didnae like the pit ye were in in the '60s, ye could ha' left the pit, say, on the friday and possibly be staired in **another** pit b' the monday. There was plenty o' pits in the area in that time. Alot mair than what there is noo.

To conclude, the early period is characterised by some contradiction. As with the British coalfield as a whole, there was an ideological commitment to the industry among the miners, and sufficient material benefits to the industry which ensured the miners' good will. Certainly, in retrospect there is a prevailing romantic picture of this period, which portrays these years as ones of comparative harmony. However, at the same time, Fife appears to have been characterised by a greater preparedness to challenge management, and to criticise the new system at local level. Overall, it would seem that the reaction was largely subdued although, as with national developments, the Fife miners were to join in the resurgence of industrial militancy in the late 1960s. The question is, therefore, what was responsible for the renewal of large-scale national conflict to the industry, and the role of the Fife miners within this.

#### 7.4 Coming Full Circle.

Despite the Coal Industry Acts passed in 1965 and 1967 which sought to ease the social problems facing the industry as increasing numbers of men were displaced, by payments to miners losing their jobs[15], and the attempts of the NCB to offer alternative employment, the situation became increasing hard as the decade wore on. This was largely due to the difficulty of placing men as more pits were closed[16]. Jackson identifies three major problems for the miners. Firstly, often the men made redundant were those whose age made reemployment unlikely; secondly, miners tended to have little experience of alternative



types of work and, thirdly, the areas hit worst, such as Scotland, tended to be ones with few alternative opportunities anyway[17]. In such circumstances the miners became more acutely aware of their grievances.

A second source of problems was the declining wage rates miners earned in comparison with other workers. Although between 1959-1970 the average earnings in the industry rose by about 90%, for the manufacturing industries this figure was about 135%[18]. Crouch argues that the union's preoccupation with pit closures was largely responsible for the real drop in wages for it sought to avoid confrontations on this issue[19]. However, it was the problem of pay which was to enable a resurgence in militancy after the National Power Loading Agreement of [NPLA] 1966, by establishing a national payment system which facilitated unified action by the Areas. At the same time there was a growing centralisation in the Board's bureaucratic structures which, as was seen in Hamilton's arguments, may have engendered a greater distance between management and men, and thus of grievance[20]. Consequently, although nationalisation had weakened the effectivity of action at the local level by removing the area of contestation to the national level, the NPLA enabled a greater potentiality for mass action at a time when bureaucratic centralisation was encouraging grievances in the pits.

However, it was not merely practical problems which may be held accountable for the increased militancy of the miners, for there was also an ideological change. Allen, for example, argues that by the time of the return of a Labour Government in 1964 there was a awareness among the miners that Labour was not the answer to all socio-economic problems, and a growing feeling that the harmony of nationalisation was over[21]. This was echoed from parliament's side, by the growing tendency to a policy of distancing government from the unions on the part of the Conservative Party in the early 1970s[22]. It was thus in a climate of growing disenchantment with consensus that the miners secured victories through national strikes in 1972 and 1974.



Yet, in many ways, it was the second of these strikes that facilitated a new mood of industrial relations in the industry, for it served to repoliticise strike action by the transparency of the government's role. Crouch argues:-

... the strike became 'political', not because any individuals, whether in the NUM or elsewhere, wanted it to be so, but because the objective structural relationship between polity and economy no longer permitted the containment of industrial conflict within its own institutional sphere[23];

By the early 1970s, therefore, the climate was changing in the nationalised industry. The earlier problems were being coalesced by growing practical problems within the industry and an apparent ideological change. For the miners, the pressures to make sacrifices for the future were becoming more obviously unrewarded. Yet the subjective climate was still not perceived to have undergone a radical change. Thus, whilst conflict had never completely disappeared in the Fife coalfield, and despite two national strikes, the consensus was not seen to be totally in disrepair. Rather, it is with the progression of the 1970s that miners identify a restructuring of managerial attitudes as a result of changes in the political sphere. A 55 year old communist argues:-

There's nae doubt that up until this government came intae power, fur example, even under Heath, even during the 1974 strike that brought doon the Heath government, there was a consensus. It was government by consensus even though it was a Tory government. And, o' course, the Coal Board operated that way. It was operating a coal industry by consensus. By the consensus o' the warkers through their trade union. So that has changed. There is noo nae consensus either in the political life o' this country or in the running o' the coal industry.

We can thus see, from this communist at least, a connection between the industrial and political spheres, with management reflecting the lack of political consensus. This is related to the changing nature of NCB management. As has been seen earlier, the Board was, in many ways, seen as being 'the same team in different jerseys', due to the placing of many owners and managers from private enterprise into the management structure of the NCB;



this being in many ways necessitated by the demand for skilled management[24]. As late as 1971 Ezra claimed that all full-time members of the NCB "are people who have come up from the industry[25]." However, in the past, as this statement indicates, many engineers, managers and other staff had been drawn from the pits themselves and were thus regarded by the miners as well-grounded in the prerequisites of the industry. Yet professionalisation and the centralisation of decision-making are seen as altering the composition of managerial staff in such a way that they are now drawn increasingly from those whose qualifications have been formally gained through a university education, rather than from practical experience of the pit. This perception means that miners view modern managers as being less worthy of respect than those who had grown-up within the pits and villages. Academic knowledge is not regarded as legitimate by the miners, but as lesser than the expertise they gain through close contact with geological conditions underground. An unaligned man in his late 40s argues:-

The under-managers, they're young men. Younger than what ah am masel. And ah don't think they've got **mining experience**. They've just went tae college and just warked fra' there and got their tickets. And they have nae mining experience. And they're telling me what tae dae! Where ah know ah can dae it withoot them telling me.

The perception is, therefore, one wherein the management of the pits is viewed as increasingly alien to both the pits and, consequently, to the men themselves. They are regarded as being less in tune with conditions underground, and as operating from distant offices. Subsequently, decision-making is viewed as out of sympathy with the pits, and the decision-makers themselves as objects of derision. A 33 year old communist argues:-

Prior tae Wheeler [coming in] the Coal Board's managers at pit level were free tae manage their colliery tae a cer'ain extent. Ye know, obviously they'd tae wark under the area, but they had alot o' say in the running o' their colliery. And what we no'iced under Wheeler was that power was mair and mair being concentrated in Edinburgh, tae the effect that the pit-manager was a glorified office-boy. Ye know, the decisions were being taken in Edinburgh, "This will happen in yur pit, whether ye like it or no'." And some o' the



decisions that was taken was bluidy ridiculous. They were taking decisions in Edinburgh wi' people who'd nae knowledge o' the geology or o' the layoot o' the collieries. Ye know, it warked fine on paper. They sat doon and warked it oot on paper and, "This will wark." They didnae take intae account the geology, the wa'er, ye know, the things that **shouldae** been taken intae account at pit-level. And then they'd sit aboot scratching their bums wondering why it **didnae** wark. But, ah mean, **we've** seen it. Ah mean, ye're dealing wi' miners that's been in the pits fur **years**, and experience is a great teacher. We could see things that we knew just wasnae gaeing tae happen. And they wouldnae listen because, "We're here tae manage and yoo're here tae wark, and ye'll dae as we tell ye because we're managers," type-thing. "But it'll no' wark." "It will wark, we've warked it oot," ye know. And, o' course, we take a cer'ain satisfaction in the fact that they're si'ing scratching their arses and saying, "Why's it no' warking?" And we're si'ing here, "Ye bluidy idiots. We told ye it wouldnae wark."

This quotation serves to indicate that, at a fundamental level, the knowledge base of management is not respected by the men; that is, that the industry is currently witnessing a crisis of legitimation in its authority structures. Yet if there is an awareness, which can be found among all types of respondent, that decisions have increasingly become unilaterally imposed on the workforce with little negotiations, there is felt to have been significant changes in management's attitudes to work operations as well. There is a sense of grievance at the progressive erosion of established agreements about work practices and payment systems. A retired Labour Party member from Comrie Colliery in West Fife expresses this:-

Well, if ye take prior tae 1979, Comrie, fur possibly a 15 tae 20 year period had been a highly profitable pit. Noo, a' right, we know that geologically pits change in time, but it was as the dictatorial a'itude o' management changed that production began tae change. And these are facts. They can be borne oot statistically on what the production figures were on the peak periods, withoot even looking at the geological si'uation that prevails in the pit. And ah have nae doubt that if ye gae intae the records ye will see that prior tae 1979 that Comrie was **ayeways** on a profit-making basis. It would gae up, and it would gae doon, but nevertheless it was on a profit-making basis. The pit **ayeways** cleared its feet. Fram '79 onwards, while there were geological changes, and we were gaeing intae different seams, the a'itude o' management had changed, and by changing the a'itude o' management, we were then in an entrenchment sortae si'uation. The men could



see then that management were taking a different view. What management were saying tae the firemen was, "Naw. Ye'll no' be giving ony lines oot. They can be warking up tae their waists in wa'er and there's only gaeing tae be so many o' them get away." Whereas, prior tae that we had written agreements, what ye cried "Water Agreements", that would be adhered tae. Ye know, if a man warks in cer'ain conditions, prior tae '79 that man would be allowed fur the conditions he warked in. If a man was warking, say, in 3 feet o' wa'er, and that wasnae uncommon, when his shift was finished he automatically got up the pit. In other wards, he could walk away fra' his place o' wark, and he would be allowed what ye cried a "wet bend", and would get facilities tae get up the pit. Because it was detrimental tae his health if he had tae sit aboot in these wet conditions. The management then staired tae say, "Och look, yes ha' got far, far tae much written agreements here noo. We're gaeing tae change the ball-game." So they changed the ball-game **back**, and it was tae the detriment o' the men warking in the adverse conditions.

This quotation highlights the ways in which members of management are perceived to have become increasingly authoritarian in their attitudes, and reversed the benefits gained after nationalisation. As such, it would appear that the situation in the pits has become increasingly like that characterised by Gallie in his definition of situations wherein social inequality is highlighted by oppositional attitudes caused by bad social relations at work. Yet if, as the miners argue, this situation has become worse since the late 1970s, one must discover whether the increased hostility towards management is based on real change, or is a perceptual difference.

Evidence from other sources would indicate that the changing political climate from the 1970s has had direct consequences for industrial relations in the mining industry. Crucial to this is the document known as the Miron Report, sent privately to Derek Ezra by Wilfred Miron, NCB member with Regional Responsibilities, in December 1973. In this, Miron produces a programme to implement technological changes; alter payment structures; redirect investment to 'moderate' areas; limit future manning and remove 'subversive political influences'; ensure that as many employed as possible were not NUM members and alter management attitudes in compliance with the changes proposed. The reasons



for this were to counter the threats of potential confrontation from the miners. The requirement for this hinged on Miron's perception of the political militancy of the miners. A quotation from this document will serve to indicate its tone:-

We must keep in mind that the strategy of the NUM's Executive will become increasingly politically orientated and that its Left-Wing (Communists, Marxists and their ilk, however organisationally fragmented) will maintain a unified strategy towards the ideological end - the overthrow of the present "system".... These Left Wingers now in office, or to achieve office, are not going to be changed; they will not be diverted from their political dedication[26].

One of the 'immoderate' areas was seen as Scotland, where McGahey was singled out for especial mention as a communist, and Eric Clarke, the current General Secretary, as a Marxist. The activities surrounding the Report were to be kept quiet yet Saville argues that by 1979 "the Miron proposals were mostly in place, or in process, aided by new micro-processor technology[27]." Of greater public knowledge is the set of plans known as the Ridley Report, which was the final report of the Ridley Committee that was leaked to The Economist in May, 1978. Whilst dealing with the nationalised industries, it is the comments on the coal industry that are of most interest here. It planned a strategy for challenge from what it called a "vulnerable industry", such as coal, which operated with "the full force of communist disruptors." To quote from The Economist's summary:-

The group believes that the most likely battleground will be the coal industry. They would like a Thatcher government to: (a) build up maximum coal stocks, particularly at the power stations; (b) make contingency plans for the import of coal; (c) encourage the recruitment of non-union lorry drivers by haulage companies to help move coal where necessary; (d) introduce dual coal/oil firing in all power stations as quickly as possible[28].

Between these two, we can thus see strong indications of a move not only away from consensus but towards positive confrontation on the part of the NCB and Conservative Party in the 1970s, and a degree of convergence between the political and industrial



spheres, as was argued in an earlier quotation. The consequences of this for local management are highlighted by the following statement from an ex-member of management in Fife:-

Well, ah warked in industrial relations and so ah could see what the relations were before what ah would consider the "Thatcher Years", before 1979, when there was consultation, there was discussion, unions had a role tae play. They were a powerful force. Ye had tae manage almost by consent.... Ah used tae equate it wi' seduction and rape. Before 1979, ye had tae persuade people that this was the right thing tae dae. Ye had tae seduce them intae whatever ye were trying tae dae. Ye had tae win them, and ye had tae wark wi' them. Just as ye have tae seduce a woman by, whatever the means, by flattery and all the rest o' it. And that's an art. Nowadays, tae me, it's like rape. Ye bash them over the heid and ye dae whatever ye want tae dae. And that's the difference in management, and ah warked in management. Almost anybody could be a manager noo because ye manage by force. Ye tell people what ye want done. "Get it done or else."

The change is held by this man to have been caused by two different, but inter-related factors; firstly, the encouragement given to existing management to become tougher, and, secondly, the replacement of old-style conciliatory managers with a new, more authoritarian breed. In the new ideological climate within NCB managerial levels, therefore, management began to change their approach towards social relations within the workplace. This trend is linked by this man, as it is by the miners themselves, to the appointment of Ian MacGregor as Chairman in September 1983. The same man continues:-

Ah mean, when MacGregor was appointed, that was the signal. That was the gauntlet being thrown doon. And everybody within the Board, including management, could perceive what was gaeing tae come. Ah mean, the miners' strike was almost inevitable when MacGregor was appointed, because that signalled a cer'ain strategy that the Board was gaeing tae follow.... [Management] knew it meant trouble. They knew that that signalled a change wi' hoo the Coal Board would operate. The management that ah warked among werenae happy about MacGregor being appointed. But then the management began tae change as well, and people that ah would describe as "men in their ain right", characters in their ain right began tae get shoved oot, and being replaced by people who were there, "I haf mein orders." [People] dae [act brutally when there's a brutal government]. Ah think they respond tae the climate. As ah say, within the existing management the worst traits that were within the people who were there began tae



come oot. But even sortae independent managers who were haird men, who were men in their ain right, began tae be an **obstruction** tae the Board, because they wanted people who would **dae** what they were told and ask nae questions. Ah mean, ah warked fur a boss who was a haird man. He was a bit o' a bastard but he was an **honest** bastard, if ye know what ah mean! But he was replaced wi' a guy who was a bastard but who was a **dishonest** bastard. In other wards, the previous guy, if the knife was wielded ye **knew** who was wielding it and what ye were ge'ing it fur. And then there was a whole air o' **dishonesty** introduced. And people were appointed who would **dae** what they were told. Cairry oot the line.

This statement is illuminating for it indicates not only that in the new ideological climate that management began to redefine the possibilities for industrial relations, but also highlights that, in some ways, managment may have not changed in any fundamental sense but were, rather, constrained by the earlier climate of consensus to take a more conciliatory tone than was believed in. He argues:-

Well, Thatcher, o' course, heralded a new phenomenon in British politics, in ma view. And probably Michael Edwards in British Leyland set the pattern when he took on the British Leyland warkers. And if ye want tae pick a figure, Derek Robinson. The secking o' Robinson, and ge'ing away wi' it, being able tae **dae** it. And the laws that the Tories were introducing, changing the industrial law in preparation fur their attacks on the trade unions, created a new kindae climate in which all the **warst** elements in management came oot. Ah mean, ah saw people **change**. **Individuals change**. The **manager** changed. The guy ah warked fur **changed**, because there was a changing climate. And all his warst characteristics come oot. Previously, he would ha' **loved** tae have been able tae tell people, "Well, get it done." But he had tae wark wi' a given framewark o' the Employment Protection Act, unfair dismissal, the need fur trade-union consultation and all the rest o' it. And he felt somewhat **released** b' that. And **encouraged** by the kindae government that we had. And people **changed**, and they began tae seek **retribution** fur the years in which they had **had** tae consult wi' the Unions. Management **didnae** particularly **like** consulting the Unions. And they staired tae manage, as they saw it. **Management** would take decisions. And there was a whole change in atmosphere taking place.

The accuracy of such a view is supported by Jackson who, in



reference to the early years of nationalisation, states that:-

... the Coal Board dealt more sympathetically with the NUM than some expected, [yet] it is also true that to a certain extent the Coal Board's reaction to the NUM was not merely based on 'loyalty', 'political sympathy' or any other such factor, but on the need to attract and retain manpower if it was to satisfactorily meet the demand for coal in the late 1940s and early 1950s[29].

Thus, it would appear that early consensus was based on the calculated need to keep the miners happy; a situation which was in reverse by the early 1980s. For the miners, MacGregor's appointment was seen as the last irrefutable proof that the days of consultation and conciliation were over. Mick McGahey summed-up the mood when he said that it was a "declaration of war on the British miners. He was prepared to butcher any industry. Having declared his position the miners had to take action[30]."

If, however, the miners were concerned about the trend that the new Chairman was seen as epitomising, there were also growing feelings that the new-style management did not have the best interests of the industry at heart, but were colluding in the rundown of the pits. Starved of investment, and reduced to four pits in Fife, there was a sense of resentment at what was perceived as the wasting of national interests for unsound reasons. One retired member of staff describes the climate in the NCB before his retirement:-

Verra, verra doomed, ah felt. That's the ward. Cer'ain individuals at the top o' the tree were no' feeling that production was important. They ayeways told ye the economics o' the thing, the economics o' the thing, the economics o' the thing. Noo, people that ah knew, who were guid mining engineers, publically they would say one thing, condemn the miners, but privately would say, "But we need some mair investment in." But they werenae standing up and being counted and that, ye know what ah mean. They were saying it privately but no' saying it publically. And ah felt the a'itude o' the management was they were gaeing tae cut the mining industry tae size. And ah mean that both ways. They were gaeing tae cut the industry tae size, and they were gaeing tae cut those who **warked** in the industry, especially the trade unions, they were gaeing tae cut **them** tae size. And they were gaeing oot their way tae dae it.



If lack of investment and expansion were seen as responsible for the debilitated state of the industry by the early 1980s, however, this situation was the result of inaction only. But there was also a sense of grievance about what was seen as the deliberate ruination of the industry through conscious actions on the part of management. Among the Fife miners this aspect is most generally expressed in relation to the closure of Bogside in early 1984. This pit is commonly regarded, by miners of all political beliefs, as having been closed as the result of the deliberate sabotage of the Board. One COSA member tells the story:-

Some o' the things that happened would be unbelievable, because if they'd happened in private industry, or if they'd happened in some o' the other industries, some people would be standing in the dock having tae justify what they done. Well, Bogside mine, this was at the commencement o' the strike when it was warking on. Bogside mine got intae difficulties where the management were taking a stond wi' the trade unions.... in any si'uation prior tae that the main concept was safety and save the colliery. All effort was there tae save the colliery. And this one was where they took the stond and it appears, fra' information that's come oot since, by instructions fra' the top, "Switch aff the main pumps and withdraw." Noo, that's fatal in deep-mining, because that's tantamount tae saying, "We're gaeing tae flood it." Noo, in the furst instance, the judgement fra' management was, "This'll frighten them." Trade union, "It's a bluff." But it wasnae meant tae be a bluff. So the pit was flooded and, therefore, that was the finish o' Bogside. Noo, there have been emergencies [before], and in ony other si'uation right through industry, right, through various things, and nae way would that ha' been allowed tae happen. And anyone who allowed that tae happen would ha' tae ha' made accountability, or an explanation. A full enquiry. But we got nae enquiry o'er Bogside. That was the end o' story. Just written aff. Well, we called it industrial vandalism. Ah mean, it was actually an act, a conscious act. Because a warkman could take an act, who is just an ordinary person, who is really, sincerely, no' responsible fur his action because he daesnae know the consequences o' that action. No' fully. But mining engineers at the verra top cannae use that excuse, because he **knew** the consequences when he said, "Cut aff the pumps. Switch them aff." Naw, he **knew** the consequences that was gaeing tae happen. He **knew** that that colliery was lost fur all time. And when ye flood a pit, it is lost fur all time.

By 1984, therefore, there were deep grievances towards management held by the men. The imposition of policy decisions from outwith



the pits, changing management and social relations with managers which fostered resentment, anger at the rundown of the industry and what were seen as deliberate acts of sabotage by management, and the erosion of previous procedures. Thus, although the evidence seems to indicate that there is a certain mythology surrounding beliefs about the older-style manager, what is clear is that this mythology is drawn-upon to demonstrate the legitimisation crisis in industrial relations in recent years. The ideological climate, therefore, has seemed profoundly different to the early years of nationalisation. In this situation the older men, recalling private ownership, feeling that the dream had turned sour, inevitably made comparisons. A retired man argues:-

The mining industry, as ah see it at the present time, is noo on the basis that it's "us-and-them". It's an "us-and-them" basis. In other wards, management ha' got back tae what they were prior tae nationalisation. They've got back tae where they dictate, raither than consult. And having done that ye've noo got the kick-back fra' the warker against the boss.

## 7.5 No Going Back.

It can be seen that there was a crisis within the industry by the early 1980s, and that the early hopes for nationalisation had not materialised. The question remain, however, of the way that this past was understood for younger miners who had no direct experience of it. For the radicals especially, there is an awareness that they are now having to deal with a situation which their predecessors did not resolve. One young communist argues that the issue of control was never adequately resolved:-

... the fundamental issue was that the warkers never got control at that time. They nationalised the industry in as much as where the money was coming fram and it would be an asset to the British people, but they never gave the people that was daeing the haird graft the sortae control in the running o' the units o' their industry.

There is an awareness to be found, especially among those with a politicised world view that the consensus of nationalisation was



an illusion, and that the managerial prerogative has always remained in the last instance. A 30 year old communist argues:-

... fra' '48 on the way up till the late '70s there was a sortae illusion that nationalisation meant that there was nae "us-and-them", there was a common interest between everybody. And, tae a cer'ain extent, that did exist on the surface, and that existed in the early pairt o' ma warking life. But at the same time, they were managers and we were there tae dae the wark. It was hidden, but it came oot noo and again. The manager would say, "Well, ah've got the right tae manage. Ah'll listen tae the Union and ah'll listen tae the men but, at the end o' the day, ah've got the right tae manage and ah'll dae as ah please." And that isnae much different tae what went on before nationalisation.

Yet, this should not be overstressed. Among non-aligned men also can be found a perception of the past as a time of hardship to which the miners must not return. A man in his 40s comments:-

Oor forefeythers fought fur conditions in the mining industry, and if they hadnae done that things would have been just hoo they were then. We would ha' still been under private enterprise. Well, ye'll ken yur statistics fur the private enterprise. They were in coal in the morning and deid men in the aifternoon. The industry was that bad under private enterprise and ah wouldnae like tae see it gaeing back tae that.

Clearly, younger miners are well aware that their conditions are better than those experienced under private ownership, yet there is concern that the past, as we saw earlier, is returning in a different guise. In this sense, the history of the pits serves as a warning against a possible future. Unaligned 26 and 27 year olds comment:-

... we're gaeing back tae the, ah would say, pre-war era, where oor forefeythers fought fur the 5 day week, shorter warking hoors, ye know.

If there was private ownership ah believe ye'd get hounded and hounded mair. They'd take things aff ye that ye'd already got, the things ye've got left. Things like coal, which is pairt o' yur wages really. They'd take that aff ye, they're trying tae buy it aff ye noo, ye know.

Yet the use of the past is a selective process, and different aspects may be drawn upon to support many arguments. Thus, whilst



the statements we have seen in this chapter draw upon history significantly to show the worse conditions of the past in order to indicate a state to which they must not return, and which in comparison to the present may show certain rather worrying similarities, it is also drawn upon to highlight the extent of contemporary decline in other ways. For example, quotations we have already seen have stressed the benefits of nationalisation in comparison to private ownership, or, alternatively, current bad relations have been compared to the period up until the early 1970s. Implicit within the statements made can be seen this comparative element. Therefore, we can see that whilst the past may be used differently according to argument, its intention remains the same; namely, to prove points about a present which is regarded as rendering the miners powerless and subject to the erosion of previous material benefits.

#### 7.6 Conclusion.

This chapter has shown that initially both radicals and non-radicals were willing to support nationalisation, yet it was soon perceived that the changes were not as great as anticipated or desired, and that the miners did not have the control over their lives that they thought nationalisation would bring. Consequently, whilst in the early years conflict was not the predominant feature of the industry, at least at national Union level, due to the miners' support for the new industry, at the local level there would appear to have been a continuous current of scepticism, and willingness to participate in unofficial action, which serves to separate Fife from the mainstream coalfield.

At a local and national level conflict was to reemerge in the late 1960s as the industrial and political climate began to change. The timing of this does not correspond directly to the greatest period of contraction for both material and ideological reasons; namely, that until this time very few miners had been made redundant due to continuing transfer possibilities, and because



support for consensual industrial relations and for Labour governments still predominated. Renewed militancy thus crucially depended upon new perceptual orientations as awareness of industrial decline and political change grew among the miners.

The picture given of industrial relations would thus broadly confirm Lockwood's typification of the miners as holding dichotomous views of power structures. Yet the developments discussed appear to indicate that the arguments Hamilton gives, outlined at the beginning of the chapter, for the reasons for such views seems not to correspond with the situation in Fife. In the earlier period both radicals and non-radicals were conciliatory in their attempts to make nationalisation work, although it must be remembered that Fife quickly began to display oppositional characteristics even in the period of supposed conciliatory industrial relations; whether due to greater economic hardship and decline or, as we shall see in the next chapter, due to the presence of an active socialist socialising agent in the county. In the latter period also both radicals and non-radicals have hardened in outlook as the industrial climate has changed. All of the sample held oppositional beliefs about management, and saw their position as one of relative powerlessness. The only significant difference that emerges from the data is that the communists appear to have had a greater awareness of the failings of nationalisation at an earlier period, but when viewed retrospectively, this may merely indicate that their portrayal of significant history is more systematised within their overall political framework. What differences may be seen are that communists express their beliefs within a more coherent politicised framework which provides them with a structural body of theory within which to place their ideas and arguments.

The evidence would thus appear to bear more resemblance to Gallie's conclusions about perceptions of social inequality and work experience, with opposition bearing a close relationship to industrial conditions. However, there is also an important divergence, in that the period of harmony may be based less on an



absence of work grievances than on a willingness on the part of the miners to continue to support nationalisation. As such, one cannot simply 'read-off' oppositional attitudes from objective conditions but make allowances for the realm of the perceptual, and for presence of expectations or aspirations about the future. Consequently, one must incorporate the realm of ideas and the temporal continuum within analyses.

The examination has also served to indicate empirically the ways in which history is drawn upon by the miners. Repeatedly quotations make reference from the past to the present, present to past, or refer to past, present and future. It is this dynamic aspect to consciousness which allows us to understand the ways in which the past and present are understood in reference to each other, and how these enable the miners to develop ideas and expectations about the future; as example, warning or ideal. Yet these understandings are formed in the need to make sense of the present and its potentialities and, as such, belong within present concerns. Further, this need, especially among the aligned men, is explicitly political, in that they view circumstances as the outcome of political forces. The role of the political may thus be seen as a way of encapsulating history, as it places the temporal continuum within its framework. It is to the realm of political ideals to which we now turn to assess how the role of communism, both within the objective and subjective histories of the Fife miners, has facilitated the rendering of the immanent socialism of the miners' lives into a coherent identity and consciousness.



## CHAPTER EIGHT.

## THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY.

8.1 Introduction.

In previous chapters we have explored the particularistic social arrangements found within the mining industry and community, and how the miners' sense of identity and belief systems are defined in terms of their experiences both within these spheres and in their relations with others; be it the British non-mining public or coal owners and managers. Yet it is not believed, as we saw in Chapter One, that there is an inevitable correlation between material conditions and radical consciousness; for the evidence would seem to refute such a crude relationship between objective and subjective conditions of existence. As such, the historical propensity that has manifested itself in Fife cannot be accepted as in some way a 'natural' expression of the totality of the miners' experience, but must be explored in a more detailed fashion in order to understand how the mechanisms which lay the foundations for the production of radical consciousness interact with political factors, and how this may be perpetuated over time.

Oppressive social conditions themselves, therefore, do not necessarily result in radicalism; although one might argue that radicals require something to be radical about, and thus such conditions will be present in a radical group. As Blackwell and Seabrook argue:-

... if people feel hardship and misery, if they suffer, this in itself is not enough to create a radical response; they must be able to connect their felt dissatisfactions with a way of interpreting the world which offers, at the same time, a realistic hope of changing it[1].

Such an argument recognises the necessity of a distinctly political aspect in the creation of radical consciousness. Panitch, also, has argued that specifically political and cultural factors must be present as well as objective factors[2], as has



Stedman Jones, who argues that a plausible political language is as significant in radicalism as the experience of material hardship[3]. It is the function of this political sphere to render coherent the conditions actors' experience; it should enable connections to be made between different aspects of life and provide a vision of an alternative. As Mann argues:-

If workers possessed full class consciousness they would seek among their other goals worker control of industry and society. Such a form of control would in theory enable them to attain both material and moral fulfilment, economic sufficiency and freedom of self-expression. But few important working-class movements have pursued this all-embracing goal with any conviction. Instead, industrial action has generally split off from political action...[4].

The militancy of the Fife miners must, therefore, be related to the forces which have provided a coherent political framework within which to formulate a critique, and enabled opposition to be mounted; whether among adherents to the philosophy or the wider social group. Further, one must uncover how such a world view is grounded within the experiential concerns of the miners, and whether it has proved capable of maintaining credibility and relevance over time. The conditions discussed earlier create a grounding for radical politics through the historical circumstances of the miners and the mutualistic prerequisites of their lives, and have resulted in a strong cultural identity which is both descriptive and experiential, stating who 'we' are. This has facilitated a collectivistic, oppositional identity and belief system unifying the experiences of pit, community and Union. Yet this has been articulated in a particularistic way in Fife and thus we must seek to understand to what extent this is the result of expression of an explicitly radical world view.

The force which is held to have largely provided the basis for radical consciousness among the Fife miners is that of the Communist Party which, by systemising beliefs, directing and leading the miners over time has bound itself inextricably to Fife's historical legacy. It is, of course, hard to establish quantitative statistics upon the extent of the CP's base in the



county, and among the miners in particular. Yet there are certain indications which prove useful. Newton argues that in 1932, over 50% of the Party's membership was from the Scottish and Welsh coalfields[5]. It is not possible to break this down by county as the figures are not available, yet it is significant that West Fife, from where 75% of the sample interviewed were drawn, produced the highest percentage constituency vote for the CP in the 1950 General Election at 18.3%, and also has the highest incidence of polling over 20% of votes against the Labour Party; this being achieved five times, in 1929, 1931, 1935, 1945, 1950. Newton argues that it is an area which has provided the Party with the strongest support and membership[6]. He states that West Fife is one of the CP's two most successful constituencies in Britain, the other being Rhondda East[7].

Newton's analysis of Party members is of further interest in that it may help reveal the basis upon which this support was built, through his examination of the type of person who comes to the Party, both by background and individual qualities.

Firstly, he explains the miners' tendency to radical left-wing politics by virtue of their social and geographical immobility; consequent social alienation; homogeneous communities and dangerous occupation[8]. As such, his conclusions would accord with those already reached within the previous discussion. In relation to the characteristics and rationale for membership, he found that most communists were people who had joined as a result of a single issue which has been fought for them by Party members, who were consequently regarded as working harder than any alternative organisations[9]. It is thus through this personal contact that he argues that people are drawn into Party membership. Secondly, he argues communists are those who believe that the social order is man-made, and that this can therefore be changed by purposive political action; although they may see that they have less power over political affairs than that to which they are entitled[10]. Thirdly, communists are capable of coherent political argument and social criticism which, he argues,



is the result of self-education. Whilst this does not necessarily lead to radical political beliefs, he believes educated people are more likely to be aware of how society is ordered and governed. He states:-

The activism, drive, discipline, ability to make sacrifices and to think of the future, which are characteristics of the Communist Party member, show themselves in his attempts at self-education.... [This marks] Communists as being very different from most working-class people[11].

It is through education that critical abilities are developed for, he argues, few are Marxist ideologists on joining even though they seek social change. Further, he argues that most working-class communists are pragmatic, non-intellectual, non-utopian people, who have little religious faith in communism but whom are likely to be "little more than an active trade-unionist[12]." In a situation wherein the CPGB is a small, powerless organisation, he argues, that commitment is only sustained through "a strong consciousness of being one member of an international organisation of millions, and this helps maintain morale at a tolerably high level[13]."

Newton, therefore, highlights several factors which may aid our discussion. Of particular interest are the reasons and ways people join the Party, what the Party means for members and the consequences it has for social analysis. However, his work focuses just on Party members, and neglects to examine the way in which non-communists may follow or vote for communists who rise to leadership in an area or industry. Consequently, although his insights on individual members are enlightening, one must attempt to unravel the appeal of communism at a group level, and how this is perpetuated historically.

Analysis should thus seek to examine how communism has formed both an objective and a subjective factor in Fife's significant history, involved historically in the activities in the mining industry and also in rendering coherent life experiences. We need to uncover how the CP rose to become the dominant institutional



expression of political ideals among the Fife miners, and how it has responded to changing historical conditions. Yet we must also examine how communism interacts with the historical legacy, and this latter with the subjective understandings of Party members. Further, in the light of previous discussion, therefore, we seek to discover whether a greater awareness of the past can be found among communists, and how this affects beliefs. This chapter, therefore, seeks both to examine the historical role the Party has played locally, but also reveal its meaning for both communists and the miners they led, and place this within the contemporary setting. Thus, whilst in many senses a temporal account, the examination attempts to understand the qualitative appeal of communism in Fife, what it gives its members in the sense of identity and understanding of past and present, and assess whether it can continue to do so in the light of the current circumstances in the industry.

## 8.2 The Legacy Begins.

In previous chapters we have discussed how a particular value system, described as 'immanent socialism', was born out of the necessity for collectivism in the face of industrial conditions, and has been historically reinforced by the material hardship of the mining communities. Such a moral code unified the mining families who were isolated within bounded communities, separated from wider society. In such circumstances, penetration from other types of social agencies was restricted and the miners' beliefs formed the dominant cultural expression within the mining areas, existing outwith the formal control exercised by the coal owners. Socialisation, therefore, in the communities of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was an almost 'total' phenomenon, rooted within the experiential prerequisites of the pit and village. Yet if this was the 'raw material' upon which political beliefs could be sustained, we must discover the particular direction this took prior to the rise to dominance of the communists in the 1920s, in order to see whether it marked a new direction in belief, or a variation of previous forms.



Mining literature indicates the grounding of the miners' value system within strong religious beliefs in the period prior to the socialist revival of the 1880s[14]. Religion, of whatever form, provided a moral systematisation of thought within a world view offering a certain understanding of life experiences. In this sense, religious belief has similarities to communism in that it offer a total explanation of the world, covering all aspects of life. Further, both are, in a sense, 'utopian', and require 'decent' living in order to secure a better future. As such, communism can be seen as a continuance of earlier trends geared to finding an answer for the hardships of life. This is indicated by the argument of a communist in his 70s, who is discussing the early leaders among the miners:-

In the early days there was a great deal o' people who were in the Temperance Movement and religious movements. Six-Day Adventists, and Plymouth Bretheran and so forth, who brought tae the Union a morality, and the claim fur increased wages was a moral claim. And they were brought-up on christian principles. It was the principle that a man should be able tae live be'er than what he was daeing. And in the early days they had a tremendous influence. Then the formation of the ald Social Democratic League and the beginning o' the socialist movement in Britain, wi' the MacLeans and, tae some extent, the Jimmy Maxtons and all the others who were verra popular wi' the miners. All led tae this development fra' the moral tae the political. [The political issues the miners upheld werel based on a sense o' humanism. Ye see, ah remember an anthropologist who went wi' me tae hear Wullie Gallacher speaking. He was amazed at the number o' times that Gallacher quoted fra' The Bible on the morality o' what he was saying, ye know. And he was staggered that communists should be daeing this, ye see. And ah've done it masel, ye know. Used cer'ain phrases that were adaptable at the time. And, even at the height o' ma activities in a propaganda campaign, ah was ayeways arguing mair aboot human dignity than ah was aboot money. And that's the tradition on which we were brought-up, ye see.

This quotation thereby serves to indicate the ways in which whatever belief system the miners espouse and use to articulate their arguments, whether religious or political, it is rooted within a basic, unchanging value system expressing a plea for 'decent moral treatment'. Yet it draws attention to the move towards more secular frames of meaning in the late nineteenth



century with the socialist revival, as miners sought more temporal answers for the questions in their lives.

As MacIntyre informs us, there was no official Labour Party in Central Fife until the 1920s, yet there were a plethora of other socialist organisations. The Independent Labour Party [ILP], Social Democratic Federation [SDF] and Socialist Labour Party [SLP] were all active in the county and in Central Fife there was popular support for the anarchist ideas centring around Lawrence Storrone's Anarchist Communist League[15]. As such, there was an active, yet diverse, presence of socialist ideas in the area prior to World War One. It was from combination of building both upon these ideas and the lived experience within the mining communities that the CP was able to build a foundation in the wake of the war, yet it also tied in to the climate of political searching that was happening in the wider society. As one 55 year old communist states:-

All o' the things that were identified in Fife would be bad hoosing conditions, poor educational facilities, poverty, unemployment, cruelty and oppression by the coal owners. [But] in that period aifter the World War the same kindae movements were developing all over Europe, ye know. It wasnae just in Fife. Ah mean, in Germany things were happening, in Hungary things were happening. All over Europe there was this revolutionary trend taking place. And it was in that period that MacLean was touring Scotland, ah mean, Marxist lectures all over the place. Gallacher was developing Red Clydeside. There was the development o' the anarchist ideas that ha' come fra' France wi' this fellow, Storrone. There was the political movement o' the SDF. And all these things [came] together tae form the formation o' the Communist Party in 1921.

Fife, therefore, may be seen as participating in the general political trends of the post-war years. Yet although part of the larger movement, the ways in which the Party began and developed was grounded within specific spatio-temporal events and experiences affecting the Fife miners in the 1920s. The recent war; the conditions and confrontations to which miners returned, or faced, after the post-war boom; the ways these were handled by local leadership of the Union and the recent Russian Revolution



were thus all factors which must be taken into account when attempting to explain the spread of support for the CPGB.

World War One had profoundly disturbed those who had experienced it and this was compounded by the social conditions they found on their return home. It was a period when miners, as others in society, sought to make sense of their world; for social dislocation had both bred, or merely highlighted, anomalies which required solution. Evidence from miners of the time attests that it was at this period that many turned to different forms of literature and social analysis in an attempt to arrive at a philosophy which would explain, and thus help them to come to terms with, the nature of contemporary capitalist society[16]. One ex-miner in his late 80s, who is a founder-member of the CPGB, explains how he came to political awareness:-

But, och, [World War One] was an awfy experience fur a young lod, ye know. Wondering what it was all aboot, ye know. Ye were just flung intae the thing withoot any understanding aboot it, ye know. The shells gaeing all over the place and so on. And it was the horror o' the war. The beasts it made o' men. Ye were just a beast. That's the ward, a beast. It struck me there was something wrang wi' us that this should take place. Germans were protestants the same as ah was a protestant. When we used tae come ootae the line on a sunday ye would get a wee lecture, in an ald ramshackle hut that had been shelled, aboot hoping that God would gi' ye power whereby ye would overcome yur enemies and so on, ye know. And that statement stuck tae me. There was something wrang wi' that. **Why** should this be? This is in The Bible, ye know. God would gi' ye power tae overcome yur enemies. "Well," ah said. "There's something wrang wi' this. There are protestants ge'ing the same lecture fra' padres o'er on that side. There's something wrang wi' it." And being lucky enough tae escape the shells ah staired tae read quite alot o' stuff aboot religion and so on when ah got hame aifter the war. And ah discovered it was "Peace and Bread" that was the slogan that won the Revolution, ye know. And ah saw the thing clear, and ah joined the Communist Party in 1920. But the experiences o' war was the furst thing that made me think, in a real way, that something had got tae be done.

It was the search for a solution which made sense of, and offered a way out of, social problems which thus provided the motivating force behind the turn to communism. Having been failed by religion, it was communism which he saw as offering secular



answers to moral and socio-political questions. Yet this need to discover a new way was compounded by the conditions which confronted men on their return, which added urgency to the perception of the need for radical social change. The same man argues:-

Well, the conditions, in the main, were the things that made men come tae the Party, and especially miners that had been in the First World War, ye see. They were militant, ye know, and that's what made them come tae the Party. The conditions at that time were **terrible** in the mines, ye know. They were terrible. They were just slaves. Ah would say they were slaves in the pit at that time. There were hairdly ony safety regulations or onything like that. So the conditions in the coal mines under private enterprise at that time, in ma opinion, was one o' the basic factors, ye know, that made people revolt. That made the miners revolt against it, ye know. There was verra li'le attempts by the people who had the mines at that time tae dae ony improvements at all.

Conditions were to worsen as the end of the post-war boom saw attacks on jobs, wages and conditions, and it was in defence of these that the miners were locked out in 1921 and 1926[17]. The experiences of both lock-outs served two functions; to coalesce oppositional perceptions of society, especially in the wake of army occupation, and to widen this onto a communal basis in self-defence. Thus, to the hardship of the mining families was added a collective, conflictual orientation hardened by the clash with authority. One communist in his 70s relates how he became conscious of familial poverty in the 1920s:-

Och, ah became verra, verra conscious o' the poverty when ah was verra, verra young. Verra conscious o' the poverty in which ma femily lived. Ma feyther had died early in '26, and ma mother had tae live aff the Widows' Pension, and before that we had been living aff Social Security, what was called Public Assistance or Parish Relief, because he had died o' kidney disease. And ye became verra conscious o' the difference between yursel and mair middle-class elements in the toon. Aye, because, ah mean, ye had tae gae tae get yur allocation o' claes fra' the Parish Assistance, and ye got great tacketty boots. In the summer ye had tae gae wi' yur bare feet tae make the boots last fur the winter. And other kids were ayeways be'er dressed, ye know.



These hardships created an awareness which was heightened by the presence of troops which were brought into Fife in 1921 and 1926, by crystallising oppositional 'us-and-them' perceptions of society. An old communist recalls the army presence during 1926:-

Ye begun tae develop a hatred fur what was happening around ye. And ah'll ayeways remember, it sticks as clear in ma mind as if it was just yesterday, ah was lying in bed, in the ben, which faced the road, when there was this noise like thunder. And we all rushed tae the windae, and ma feyther run tae the ben fra' the other room. And this was the army about 5 o' clock in the morning. A noise that, ah'd noo recognise, was a demonstration o' power and strength. Making a demonstration o' strength and intimidation. And ah've searched ma memory, and ah cannae remember ever having been afraid before that. And at the same time a mixture o' hatred. Ah think it must ha' come fra' the expression on ma feyther's face. And ah was cer'ainly afraid though, o' course, ah realise noo that that was the purpose o' the exercise.

For the miners and their families, therefore, the inter-war years were characterised by poverty, bad industrial and social conditions and conflict; for which they sought alternatives and from which they sought escape. A communist in his 50s, clearly implementing the legacy, argues:-

... at that period people were looking fur an alternative tae the conditions that they lived in in this post-war period. Ye know, the First World War and the aiftermath o' that. They were looking fur an alternative tae what capitalism was giving them. And obviously the McArthurs and the Moffats, these people were influenced by whatever Marxist ideas were being expounded at that time, and saw that as an alternative.... looking fur an alternative tae capitalism which had meant a destructive war and then poverty and unemployment and all the rest o' it. And McArthur and Moffat and these people, warking in the harsh conditions o' the mining industry, took hold o' these ideas, became communists, and then exerted a cer'ain influence and leadership among people.

Yet if the miners turned to the communists for leadership this was due to the perceived failure of the existing leadership within the union to tackle these problems. As we have seen in Chapter Two, conflicts between the old-style Lib-Lab leadership, led by Willie Adamson, and young militants led to two splits in the FKCMA, firstly in 1923 with the formation of the FMRU and then again in



1929, at which time the UMS was established. Regarded as right-wing and in collaboration with the coal owners, the leadership was seen as failing to express the needs and aspirations of those whose voices it nominally represented. Alienated from the established leadership many miners turned to alternative spokesmen. One 75 year old communist speaks of this disillusionment with the old-style officials:-

Wullie Adamson run what we called, and ah must say [it] quite frankly, the scab union. He run the scab union and was mair concerned wi' cooperating with the management than representing [the men]. In fact, he was hated by the bulk o' the miners who were forced tae join his union. Because ye had tae be a member o' the union in they days before ye could get a job, and ye had tae be in employment before ye could become a member o' the union.

The old leadership were thus regarded as out of touch with the direction many young miners were taking, and consequently lost support of militant sections of the community. One old miner, for example, told of how a Labour Party burgh councillor, Tam Kirkcaldy, had been one of three local scabs in Denbeath in 1921, and consequently was confronted by angry women burning effigies of him. Claiming that the Labour Party lacked a coherent political philosophy, he argues:-

The kindae labour leaders that arose were small-minded, verra poorly politically-developed people, but wi' a great talent fur bluidy opportunism. Because all the scabby opportunists were the leadership. Chancers. Politically, their talents were just that they were chancers.

Disenchanted with the labour leaders many young men turned to the communists, who were seen as actively engaged in the pits and communities in the agitational fight for jobs, wages and conditions. Men drawn to the Party at this time argue that it was because the communists voiced arguments that they wished to hear. It was at the instigation of the CP, as we have seen, that Workmen's Inspectors were established in some Fife pits, in line with Clause 16 of the 1911 Mines Act, which laid for this provision. As such, in a divisive situation in the union, it was those who were active in organising activities, meetings, fighting



evictions, and voicing the miners' demands through their pit papers that came to the fore as a new leadership. A retired communist argues:-

So, in that situation where there was a division between the leadership and the requirements o' the miners, arose these political leaders; Davie Proudfoot, John McArthur, Jimmy Hope and many others. They were men o' great ability, wi' a strang agitational approach. But also men wi' a guid capability fur developing organisations and, therefore, they helped begin the process o' building the unity o' the Sco'ish miners right fra' root base. These men eventually created the unity o' the Sco'ish miners which were split intae li'le shire groups and so on, like the Fife miners and so on, under the control o' men who were mair interested aboot cooperating wi' the coal owners than representing the case o' the miners.

The appeal of such men did not lie solely in their practical organisational work, however, but in their ability to express, and render coherent, the concerns of the miners. Political meetings and discussions were a common feature of the mining communities at this time, as residents gathered to discuss important issues to their lives. One old miner remembers:-

In the villages o' they days on the street corner was the local parliament, where all the men used tae meet. And sometimes, if there was an issue, all the women and, in fact, all the village would meet at the street corner tae discuss something appertaining tae the village. And, therefore, ye would hear people like Wullie Gallacher, and Abe Moffat and Alec, but mostly Alec in those days, not Abe, and people who la'er became important communists fra' all over the country.

The understandings the communities formed about the problems of their lives were crucially dependent upon the availability of a coherent political philosophy, for it provided them with a systematised world view which gave form to their analyses. However, this was made possible by the correlation between the ideology of the Party and social actuality. A retired communist argues:-

Well, they had such an impact on their lives, ye see. They were the men that led things. They led the miners and the wards they were using corresponded tae the experience o' the people. And, therefore, the message sunk hame. This [was] what MacLean and the others were adept at. And Gallacher, and others like Joe Leckie, Danny Gillis and so forth. Furst



class agitators. Furst class orators. And what they were saying corresponded tae the physical life o' the people who were living. And, o' course, they were drawing the political lessons fra' that.

Yet if the tenets of communism gave a framework of meaning by which actors could assess their lives and society, the theoretical arguments were coalesced around the possibilities for a new social order as epitomised by the Russian Revolution. For the young militants, the Soviet Union offered a vision of a society free from the hardships and worries they encountered in capitalist Britain. Rather than being a purely abstract adherence to communist philosophies, therefore, the miners' beliefs were borne out of the necessity, perceived from their own experiences, for material and political change. Thus, if communism offered a creed which made sense of their objective conditions, the Soviet Union provided the empirical evidence of the attainability of its goals. A communist in his 80s argues:-

Ye've tae understond that because o' the impact o' the Revolution, and the growth o' the socialist movement at that time, everybody hoped, or believed, that verra soon in Britain we would dae something similar tae that.

The Revolution was thus the source from which hope sprang and to which it was directed, As MacIntyre informs us, admiration of the Soviet Union was common not only among militants, but also the wider communities in Fife in the inter-war years[18]. The miners in the Russian coalfields were believed to enjoy far better employment and social conditions than their colleagues in Britain, and the social benefits of the Soviet system were widely reported by those who went on visits. The vision that the Soviet Union provided was clung to even after stories of the show trials began to reach Britain. Whilst sympathy declined among some previous admirers[19], many communists continued to believe that a workers' state would liberate them because they had to believe in the possibility of a better future. Even today, whilst many young communists express amusement or exasperation at the 'Tankies', so-called due to the acceptance of Stalin's invasion of Hungary,



many of the older generation continue to affirm this admiration:-

It was great. It was great. Inspiration and hope. Well, the Soviet Union and the Russian Revolution at that time, ye know, it was a great inspiration tae us fellas, ye know. And they could dae nothing wrang. And they can dae nothing wrang yet, and that's ~~ma~~ opinion.

As we can see, the rise of the Party in Fife was borne largely out of the experiences of war, social upheaval and unrest and the grievances of the miners with their union leadership. Yet these were enabled due to both the existence of socialist beliefs already present in the county, to the ideas of the newly-formed Communist Party which were articulated by local men, and the events of the Russian Revolution. Miners were drawn to the Party in order to seek solutions to life experiences and a programme for a better future. Yet by expounding these within the villages they were able to express, in a systematised fashion, the inherent beliefs and concerns of the wider mining community. Their appeal lay in their very position in the industry and locality, for the their own origins within the pit villages enabled them to voice the value system grounded in the miners' lives. The concerns of the leaders were those of the led. Yet the leaders were in crucial ways different from the rank-and-file, for they came to symbolise those beliefs and manifest key values. This combination of the abstract and the material has been central to the ability of the Party to continue its appeal.

### 8.3 Living the Legacy.

When miners speak of their past and of the distinctive nature of Fife within the British coalfield there is a strong tendency to frame their arguments in reference to the men that gained leadership in the county. "Well, we had the Moffats, the McArthurs and Proudfoots and so on." By expressing themselves in such a way, they indicate that such men are regarded as being in a sense 'heroic' figures; miners that by virtue of specific qualities rose to the fore in the pits and villages. It is this factor which enables us to argue that the nature of political



leadership in Fife bears close correspondence to Weber's theorisation of 'charismatic' leadership. This, Weber claims, is a form of exceptional personal leadership, based on a sense of mission, which inspires hope and trust among the led. Charisma, he argues:-

... may effect a subjective or internal reorientation born out of suffering, conflicts or enthusiasm. It may then result in a radical alteration of the central attitudes and directions of action with a completely new orientation of all attitudes towards the different problems of the "world"[20].

Yet whilst inciting strong subjective belief among participants, the strength of charismatic leadership is its weakness. Personified around key individuals it may, with the passing of such figures, decline. In order to perpetuate itself, charismatic leadership must either become routinised among followers or, alternatively, it may gain further legitimacy through hereditary succession. Such arguments carry interesting parallels for the area under discussion, for it would appear superficially that the political leadership in Fife may have been in this charismatic mould. If so, we would expect difficulties in political reproduction. Consequently, we must further explore the meanings and basis of leadership.

As we saw in an earlier chapter, the characteristics leaders are seen as possessing may be taken as highlighting key values of importance to the miners: they encapsulate the value system in human form. Leaders, it may be argued, symbolise a moral philosophy underlying the miners' beliefs, and also that which they demand of their leadership. One such man, although not a miner, was Willie Gallacher, the Communist MP for West Fife between 1935-50. An old communist speaks of him:-

William Gallacher. Gallacher was the man who influenced me. He was a great man. One o' the greatest, ah think. Ye know, ah was personally acquainted wi' Gallacher. A great man. He was an unselfish man, verra unselfish. His whole life dedicated tae the warking class, ye know, and tae liberation. Any injustices, he hated them. And the fire that was in him, ye know. Ah used tae chair quite alot o' mee'ings fur Gallacher, and when ye were on the platform, if it wasnae a



verra solid construction, ye thought the platform was gaeing tae collapse, ye know. He ayeways come oot wi' that strength and energy against the injustices. He was, och, **terrible** on that.

Yet if communist leaders personified certain moral values, this was not purely the perception and expression of the ideals of others, but also how they felt themselves that they should act; that is, they subscribed to the same values. The argument behind this is that leaders should lead by example if they are to justify their position as such. Further, if the miners are to follow their leaders' advice, this should not be based on empty rhetoric but on a philosophy grounded within life. The same man sums up this argument and reflects on what his life has meant to him:-

[The influence o' people like McArthur and those in the 20s and 30s] it's played a pairt in influencing the people, ye know. It must have. Because ah think that precept that Gorbachov talks aboot, the force o' example, ye see, the force o' **example**, ye know, is be'er than a thousand lectures. And that's the point, yur example, if ye've been **exemplary**. And, incidentally, this is one o' the characteristics that Lenin lays doon that a communist should have. One o' the characteristics should be an exemplary character as an individual. Noo, that's almost impossible in human society but, nevertheless, ah think it should be attempted tae be practised, ye know. And ah feel ah ayeways try tae quote yon Russian one, it wasnae Lenin that made that quotation, but its ayeways mentioned at an oration service fur ony o' the Party comrades. "Life is given tae man but once. It should be so lived as no' tae be smeared wi' a trivial and cowardly past. So lived that, when dying, he can say, 'All ma life, and all ma energy ha' been devoted tae the greatest cause in the world, the liberation o' mankind.'" Ah've lived ma life, and ah'm quite happy. And ah would live it o'er again the same way. Ah feel that's the thing. If ye're daeing what ye feel is necessary tae be done, and ye don't have ony inhibitions, and ye act according tae yur thoughts and the given circumstances in which ye're in, and try tae improve things, ye get sa'isfaction ootae that.

If leaders are to be an example to the rank-and-file, therefore, they have to live the moral philosophy they espouse, that they can set a standard for others to follow. Their encapsulation of moral values thereby demands that they conform to a 'master status'; that is, that they are a simple, living expression of ideals. One



communist in his 70s speaks of the appeal of such men whilst relating an amusing anecdote which sums this up well:-

[They got that power because] they were extremely articulate. They were so close tae their ain class. They were so close they understood the things well. They were so articulate, and they had begun tae adapt a Marxist analysis tae history and were able tae express it in simple language tae the ordinary warkers so the message got hame. And, above all perhaps, they were men o' tremendous integrity, moral and otherwise, ye see. Sexually. And they were nearly all strict tee-totallers, ye see. Gallacher took all his time tae speak tae ye if he knew ye'd been in a pub. And ah remember, fur example, when ah furst come tae [Methill] aifter ah got warking. Ye know hoo young men are aboot fashions, ye know. And there was a mee'ing at 7 o' clock doon in Buckhaven wi' the Communist Party. Ah was still in the Young Communist League at that time, but ah was gaeing tae the Party mee'ing because there was nae Young Communist League [nearby]. And ah walks in all dressed-up tae gae tae the dancing when the mee'ing was finished, in ma silver-grey flannels and all the rest o' it. So John McArthur says, "Well, it's nice tae see yes coming all dressed-up and making the Party look mair bluidy respectable. But," he says. "Aifter the mee'ing's finished, \_\_\_, ah want tae talk tae ye." Ah would be 19, ah think. So he says [aifterwards], "Remember this, \_\_\_, " he says. "A young man can gae aboot having all types o' sexual experiences," he says. "And they can even nip intae another man's bed when he's on the night-shift. But no' communists, no' communists. Communists cannot behave like that. Communists must set a moral example tae the rest o' the people and ye cannot afford tae behave like that." And ah'm 19 years ald! Ah'm no' even wenching at the time! And this is the kindae atmosphere in which ye were brought-up.

Yet this upright moral stance does not display a purely abstract adherence to an ideal standard but is determined by the practical necessities of life. Good leadership depends upon the trust of the rank-and-file if it is to be successful. Thus the messianic perceptions of leaders were based upon the awareness that they must command such trust if their position was to be validated. The same man, himself to become Chairman at a large colliery in East Fife, continues:-

[That moral integrity is] right. It's right. Ye see, ah was telling ye, fur example, that aboot [how] if a man's aff sick [ye'll have the] miners coming tae say, "Ye'd be'er get up and see the lad's wife," ye see. Or ah'd gae tae see a lad in hospital, and ah'd ask him aboot cer'ain papers that ah was wanting fur his case. "Ye'd be'er gae and see the wife, \_\_\_\_."



Noo, a Secretary, a leader o' the miners, has tae behave in such a fashion that the man has nae fear o' ye, o' saying tae ye, "Gae and see ma wife." He's no' fearing that ye'll try it on or something like that. He has tae have that confidence in ye before ye even speak tae him. And, therefore, ye have tae live in such a way that ye justify that confidence.

What seems to have operated, therefore, was a two-way process. Communism, it has been argued, built upon a moral code already latent within the miners' lives and channelled this into an explicitly political expression, yet, at the same time, the adherence to this code among communists both compelled them to leadership and equipped them for it. This was reinforced by that compulsion; for political beliefs provided the source of commitment to fight for the miners. They therefore justified their place at the fore by a reputation for hard work, an upright character and political determination. A 30 year old communist talks of past leaders:-

Well, ah would say the communists in the leadership have ayeways had the respect, have held the respect o' other people, and that's because o' their ability tae fight fur the miners, and tae promote things and get action taken, and tae bring about cer'ain changes on behalf o' the miners. The communists are a wee bit mair gifted at daeing that, ah would like tae think. But people are no' respected because they're communists. It's respect fur the wark ye dae.

This perception is not just to be seen as a self-glorification on the part of Party members, however, but is to be found among non-communists also. A Labour Party activist in his 30s expresses a similar point:-

... in the past there emerged great men, great leaders in the various pits, and the bond o' communism held them together. They led the way, and they fought fur justice fur the men. They werenae feared tae take up the fight. In many cases they were put oot the pit themself. But at that time there was all the different pits, so they found their back in another pit, and they kept the struggle gaeing. They helped organise the Fife miners fur be'er conditions, shorter warking hours.

However, if leaders can, in this way, be held to stand apart from the rank-and-file, by virtue of their commitment and symbolisation of ideal qualities, at the same time they are regarded as being no



different from the membership. They are "just ordinary working-class folk." As has been argued, this is because such men belonged within the mining industry and communities, and were thus able to facilitate the grounding of communist beliefs within everyday experience. Yet this very rootedness within the locality meant that communism was, and is, perceived in terms of the individuals and families who expounded the belief system. Thus, whilst communists can be held to personify a moral and political code, communism itself has been personified. The two elements are mutually reinforcing. By this personification communism has not been perceived necessarily as an abstract political philosophy but in terms of the individuals who symbolised it; that is, the characters of local communists became, in a basic sense, what communism has been seen as being. A Labour Party member argues:-

Ah believe in the past that folk voted fur the communist members because o' what they were ~~themsels~~, no' because they stood on a communist ticket; i.e., "Ah'm a communist so vote fur me." Ye cannae dae that. They were, and they acted and they breathed communism. They didnae just talk about it.

This acceptance of communism was therefore based on practical knowledge of individuals espousing such beliefs who operated within spheres of life available to communal witness. In this sense the miners' beliefs and the political philosophy were mutually reinforcing due to the leadership. It was based on an identity of interests formed by experience and informing experience. One communist ex-official recalls an incident which expresses this well:-

When ah was leader at the Michael pit ah did a pit-heid mee'ing, a political pit-heid mee'ing every fortnight in which ah politicised the men. That was apairt fra' branch mee'ings. Ah just held a mee'ing in the canteen in which ah introduced the politics o' the si'uation that they were confronting. And this is hoo we were all trained, by example. By the Moffats and such, see. But ah cairried on this intense politicisation o' members. [And through oor actions wel kept the tradition alive. And, ah think, sometimes ye did it so effectively ye took great pride in it, ye see. Fur example, ah remember - and ah suppose this is conceit but ah cannae help it - gaeing intae the hall, there'd be about 1700, 1600 men in the hall, and ah'd been aboot tae leave the hoose when the 'phone rung, and ah had tae spend a few minutes on the 'phone. The result



is ah arrived at the hall ten minutes late and the hall was full. And ah had tae walk doon the hall and all the men staired tae clap as ah walked doon. And ah said tae David, "We're ge'ing there noo, David," ah says. "That's no' because o' \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_, but because they ken what \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_'s got tae say. They already **know** what ah'm gaeing tae say, and they're gaeing tae **like** what ah'm gaeing tae say." And that's hoo ye measure [yur success]. They're yoo, and ah'm them, ye know. Ye have a complete identity, a complete identity o' interests. No' because o' yoo as a personality, there's no' hero-worship about it, because they know ye fra' arsehole tae breakfast. They know yur faults and yur weaknesses. There's nae hero-worship about it, but an **identity** wi' what ye're gaeing tae say, that's all.

The following of the communists was not, first and foremost, based on the adherence by the rank-and-file to a body of theoretical knowledge, therefore, but due to the inter-connection between moral belief and the practicalities necessitated by everyday life. The closeness between the two enabled the miners to judge a person's fitness for leadership. A statement from a non-communist expresses this, as well as revealing perceptions of what is deemed worthy in a leader:-

If there was someone like [Abe Moffat] come through [noo], he would be **building** a relationship wi' the miners in the various pits. He would be gaeing **roond** the various pits and ge'ing **involved**. And people would get tae **know** him fur what he is. And if he was a fraud, they would find oot, and if he was a genuine folk, they would **respond** tae that. Whether he was a communist, or socialist, or Labour or whatever ye'd cry it. They'd see him fur what he is, and if his road's right, that is what they'd dae. They would follow that man.

Thus whilst Fife has a reputation as an area with a tradition of communist leadership and militancy, this would not appear to be based upon a mass acceptance of the explicitly communist world view but, rather, that it is an area where communists were followed by virtue of their commitment to action, ability to systematise experience and articulate a particularistic value system. Indeed, support may come from those who do not necessarily perceive a connection between personal behaviour and political belief. Young Willie Clarke speaks of his father's



election to Regional Council:-

[The appeal o' communists] depends on the individual. It's like ma feyther. When we got him elected here as a councillor they didnae elect a communist, they elected Wullie Clarke. And they didnae see that being a communist makes Wullie Clarke what he is. People didnae realise that.

That acceptance is based on common sense assessments about an individual's worth and good faith appears to indicate that communism may be perceived not as 'political' in an organisational sense, but rather as an attitude to, and way of living, life. In this sense it resembles more the adherence to a religious creed; to accept its tenets affects the way an individual will think and act in a fundamental sense. That this was possible is, perhaps, due to the apparent fact that Fife does not appear to have been historically susceptible to the religious divisions which have characterised much of Scotland, and which, therefore, allowed for a broad-based appeal to cut across different social groups. Many in the sample have argued that these existed to a lesser extent in the county. Certainly, Gallacher's constituency fell within that part of Fife with a higher Catholic density - a section of society which has historically proved antagonistic to communism - and Abe Moffat was a councillor in Valleyfield, also in this area. Moffat's son argues:-

If ye take Gallacher's election in 1935, he didnae win it purely by communists. He had a wide appeal tae the Fife constituency. We had all sections warking fur him. That's something ye seem tae be able tae achieve in Fife. Ye can get a mixed group, but ye can take them wi' ye. And as a Communist Party we did that in 1935. [Religious division] never reared its heid at any time in Fife.... They were living together, living together, withoot the factions that seemed tae exist in other areas - such as the Lothians and Lanarkshire.

This would appear to be borne-out by a Catholic Labour Party member in his 60s from West Fife:-

We didnae look and ask what their political persuasions were. We looked at what they done fur the people they represented, and it was immaterial whether they were Marxists or communists or whatever ye want tae label them. Providing they had the



right belief in relation tae what was gaeing tae be best fur the people that they represented. They couldae been onything.

The appeal seems to lie in that whilst communism channels the direction for perception of, and action within, the world it is rooted within pre-existing experiential factors. Objective conditions predispose them towards such a philosophy which then affects the potentiality for future thought and action. The foundations for communist beliefs within the life experiences of pit and community mean that to adhere to such a world view is not an external gesture, different to other forms of belief and activities already established, because it is part of what many are undertaking already by participating within the occupational community. Further, and relatedly, for many non-communists within the sample, politics refers to the Labour Party and is part of the macro-level of political action in Britain; concerned with policy formation and bureaucratic machineries. A routinised national electoral machine. Thus, for example, non-communists may say that the Labour Party represents the miners best, because they are in a position to do so, but that the CP serves them best. Consider the following quotation from a Labour Party member in his 40s:-

Definitely the Labour Party's the only one that backs them, like. But, well, ah'd like tae rephrase that. Ah cannae say the Labour Party's [the best], especially aifter the miners' strike. The full labour movement, the Labour Party and TUC just stood back and let it all happen tae us. Let us get hammered as a trade union. The Tories arenae gaeing tae represent the miners, and yur Liberals and yur, ken, minori'y pairties arenae. The Communist Party have been, the Communist Party, ah've found oot through experience, they dae the best job though. [They're] mair united. Mair united. And they've got, its haird tae describe it, but ah've found oot through attending rallies during the strike, and even aifter the strike and before the strike, ken, that ah've never met a bad member o' the Communist Party, as a person, like, ye know. And ah've met some wonderful people, ye ken, that's came oot as the betterest people, and their views o' socialism ha' been aboot the same as mine, ken.

This quotation highlights ambiguities contained within attitudes to 'political' parties, and shows the perception of the Labour Party and CP as operating in different spheres. The Labour Party is seen as an electoral machine functioning at national level, and



not rooted within everyday concerns in the way the CP has been traditionally. Electioneering, in a national sense, is not what the miners want the CP for, which is perhaps due to the CP's failure to become a contender for power in the British political system. Its lack of power means that it is not seen as in a position to affect the major structural trends affecting the miners' lives. Yet this weakness is also a strength, for if the CP is not in a position to ~~make~~ promises, it also cannot break them, which is seen as a fault of the Labour Party. The acceleration of pit closures under a Labour government, and the lack of national backing for the miners in the 1984-85 strike are both seen as epitomising Labour's lack of concern for the miners. They are perceived as betrayals.

The CP, however, with no voice in national politics has been, of necessity, a community-orientated organisation fighting on the immediate issues affecting local residents. Thus, the CP, as a party of political 'outcasts', has championed the very causes which are most nearly felt in the communities. The Party is consequently bound up in the miners' lives whilst the Labour Party, remote in London or moving slowly through constituency bureaucracy, is not. In this way, the Labour Party is part of a governmental 'them' even though all the miners interviewed were Labour voters, [except for those who voted communist when possible].

There is a further weakness contained within these circumstances for the Labour Party. Both the remoteness and the greater socio-economic diversity in composition of the Labour Party means that it is harder to conceive of it as having a clear-cut identity. Relatedly, the divisions within it make it hard to establish what a socialist 'is', and what such a person stands for. As has been seen, however, the CP is viewed in terms of individuals, outstanding local figures who have championed the miners.



The Labour Party, which especially among older miners is fighting against a historical reputation of being right-wing and collaborationist, is further embattled by the fact that good local Labour leaders and activists are not seen as embodying the party in the same way as do communists. The Labour Party stands outwith the locality and is personified, through the media, by its national, not local, leading figures. This is not the case with the shadowy figures who, presumably, haunt the CP's headquarters in London. This can be seen in relation to the previous quotation, which refers to the Labour Party as a major organisation, but which individualises the CP. This personification may, however, be a hindrance rather than a help to the Party, dependent upon material circumstances.

In this section it has been argued that the CP in Fife has been crystallised around key figures who encapsulated certain positively-held values within the community, and who gained a respect locally through their commitment to the miners' cause. It thereby established a political hegemony in the inter-war years through the key role played by 'charismatic' leaders in analysing the circumstances confronting the miners and directing beliefs and action. Consequently, whilst manifestly articulating a political ideology, its appeal lay in its work at the micro-level. Further, its strength lay in its symbolisation of a moral code and its perception as lying in the immediacy of everyday life. Thus, although clearly an internationalist doctrine, it gained dominance through the articulation of local concerns[21].

Yet this may prove to be a vital weakness also, for the reproduction of the world view was enabled through the closeness of ties between activists and the pits, both in a material, situated sense, and in terms of its major orientations. As such, the decline of the industry and its communities may have led to crucial reversals for the Party as its most central rationale and recruiting ground locally has dwindled. In addition, it may be that, due to the personification of communism, the Party's ability to keep a high profile may have been undermined as the



particular individuals who maintained a communist visibility locally have left the industry; that is, that personification of politics may create problems for its routinisation. What must be examined, therefore, is how the Party has been able to reproduce itself historically and whether it has continued to be enabled to do so as the conducive environment has weakened. Crucially tied up with this question are the continuing understandings miners have of communism, and its effectiveness, and the role of the legacy within this.

#### 8.4 Reproducing the Legacy.

The CP has traditionally acted in Fife to provide a framework of reference within which to locate and comprehend experience and belief. Fed through known individuals it has consequently become an integral part of the objective historical legacy of the Fife miners, affecting both communists and non-communists through the stories of the past which are interwoven with these individuals. Thus, the Party is inseparable from the history of Fife. Yet, further, the personification of communism has been a vital element within the reproduction of radical beliefs through facilitating the transmission of this through personal, generational contact within pit and community; that is, that politicisation has been rooted within informal relations rather than being a formal socialisation through a party not rooted in life experience. Central to this have been familial relations.

As has been noted in a previous chapter, there was a close correlation in inter-generational political beliefs for the entire sample and thus this provides a crucial link in political reproduction. As such, it would be fruitful to examine more closely the 19 miners falling within the communist part of the sample.

Of the communist and ex-communist men interviewed, 5 were of an age where fathers would have already come to political maturity and possible alignment before the formation of the CPGB. Nothing



is known about the father of the eldest respondent but the remaining 4 are known to have fathers who were active socialists. Of the other 14, 6 miners had fathers who were Party members, and a further 6 came from families where other relatives were either in the Party or were active supporters and voters without being members. Of the last 2, neither were brought-up in a nuclear family unit and it is hard to identify major influences. One of the men has now left the Party for familial reasons, and the other is now in the Party for the third time. Neither appear to come from families which are active politically. As such, we can see a close inter-generational political relationship amongst the sample. Interestingly, 18 of the 19 men are from mining families, 15 of whom are Fifers, and thus are more rooted within the region. The question is, therefore, to discover how this transmission takes place, whether explicitly or implicitly.

None of those interviewed claimed to have been subject to overt political socialisation by their families, but rather to have gained their political outlooks through identification and example. Many expressed the opinion that to have followed the previous generation politically was a 'natural' thing to do, and that they came to their beliefs through being brought-up within a conducive environment. The world view, therefore, was an ascriptive, rather than achieved, phenomenon. One man in his 50s, whose parents were both Party members recalls:-

Ah couldnae say there was any sortae deliberate indoctrination in that sense. Ah mean, ah lived in a hoose where politics were ayeways discussed. There were ayeways papers. There were ayeways books. And ah lived in the kindae atmosphere, and ye can imagine, the "Hungry Thirties", the Hunger Marches, the Spanish Civil War, where there was ayeways activity taking place. And so ye lived in that kindae [atmosphere]. And ah used tae gae tae Party mee'ings, and ah'd be taken by ma mother doon tae London tae Congress and so on. Because ma mother and feyther [were in the Party]. Ma mother was mair unusual in the sense that it wasnae common fur women tae be involved in politics. And the femily were right intae it. So ah was kindae steeped in that. And ah joined the Party in '56, and it was a reaction tae Hungary, because the communists were under attack, and in a perverted sortae way ah decided, as an act o' solidarity, that ah should join the Communist Party.



A political familial background thereby provided an enabling environment wherein ideas could be developed as the younger generation sought to make sense of their world. Yet for those whose families were politically-active there was also the presence of other activists. In this way, what was gained was not purely a familial socialisation, but a communal one, as other community members participated in the younger generation's environment. The discussions and activities that took place influenced young family members even if, as the next quotation from Abe Moffat, Abe Moffat's son, indicates, this was not perceived at the time:-

Ah think ma feyther [motivated me], in seeing the sacrifices, coming-up as a young boy, that ma family had tae make. Fighting against the injustices o' the Fife Coal Company and so forth and so on. Realising as a young boy that other people could gae on holidays and ah couldn't because ma feyther was victimised due to his trade union [activity]. People like Pollitt and Gallacher, many others, Bob Selkirk o' Cowdenbeath. Seeing the wark and activity that they were daeing and the efforts they were making, trying tae improve [conditions]. No' only in the mining industry but fur the communi'y, in Cowdenbeath, Lochgelly. Jimmy Stewart was another councillor. The discussions that took place in oor house was, ye know, "Hoo dae ye build the Party? Hoo dae we build a socialist Britain?" And these people were all sincere people. [It] had an effect on me. Seeing these people as a young boy influenced me, ah would think. Maybe no' seeing it at the time, but as ah was growing-up ah was able tae reflect on it.

Becoming a communist involved, therefore, two major aspects; both a respect for parental achievements and a wider awareness provided through the perception of communal respect towards these activities. The following quotation from Bob Selkirk, the son of Bob Selkirk, shows clearly the implicit nature of political reproduction and this awareness of the esteem in which his father was held:-

Ah don't think he tried tae give me ony major lesson. Ah think it was mair ah **admired** what he was daeing, ye know. Plus the fact o' the respect that was shown fur him by other people, even them that didnae agree wi' him politically, influenced me as far as he was concerned. He never tried tae **make** me dae onything. Ah mean, he didnae **make** me join the Communist Party, or **make** me join the YCL.



The older generation thus provided an ideal standard for the younger generation to follow. It is in this sense that, through growing-up in such circumstances, joining the CP was not a gesture taken towards external elements or philosophies or even, necessarily, a radical step, but a natural continuation of all that they knew, understood and to which they were accustomed. Becoming a Party member was, therefore, in a sense a conservative gesture, a confirmation of the values and attitudes of the past. It reaffirmed historical orientations and beliefs and, through this, legitimised them as being of relevance to both the past and present. Yet it was also a statement about the future, for it expressed location in a past/present/future continuum wherein society was seen as having been, as being, and to be, divisive and inequalitarian. On the surface, however, the confirmation of communist values was most clearly related to the past. To join the Party was the 'done thing'. This acceptance of communism as 'natural' is clearly stated by Bob Selkirk:-

Ah think that it was just that it was expected o' me. That's it. Because ma feyther was a communist and, as ah said, he was a communist councillor fur 35 years in this area, in Cowdenbeath. And he was respected. And then it was, "Bob Selkirk's son will follow Bob Selkirk." And it was the trend at that time, what yur feyther did, yoo did. Followed what he done.... [And ah joined the CP because] ah was brought-up as a communist. That's what ah was. Ah just accepted the fact ah'd be a communist because ma feyther was a communist. Ah never thought about it.

This quotation is interesting for two reasons; firstly, that it displays how Party membership may have a naturalness about it, in the sense that many christians follow their parents into the church rather than join from outwith but, secondly, it shows that the communal expectation of communists' sons could act as a guideline for normative behaviour. Thus, social expectation also played a part in informing younger men of what was expected of them. In this sense, their sons were being groomed as leaders; heirs to the fathers. However, if it was natural to follow in one's father's footsteps this could, in its own way, create difficulties for those whose fathers were 'heroic' figures. As



has been seen, leaders tended to become viewed as 'mythical heroes' imbued with ideal qualities by followers; communist and non-communist alike. As such, the expectations put upon the succeeding generation were great. Put simply, one's father could be a hard act to follow. Bob Selkirk explains:-

[It was haird]. Ah sometimes had tae dae things ah didnae want tae dae but, because they were expecting me [tae, ah did them]. And then ye were living under his shadow, "Och, ye'll never be the man yur feyther was," ye know. These things ye got flung at ye.

To be the son of a leader was, therefore, a double-edged phenomenon, for it could put pressures upon such people in the sense that demands would be made upon them that, initially at least, they were not necessarily experienced enough to meet. Yet if the expectation of 'being' like one's father could be a negative experience, it also acted as an impetus to succeed in meeting expectations; that is, that pride to be part of the legacy through familial association could motivate sons. Pride and a feeling of unworthiness could thus exist at the same time. Both feelings related to the acceptance of their father's stature: pride in association, unworthiness to be associated. Abe Moffat explains how it affected him:-

It puts a terrible burden on people. It was a burden on me being Abe Moffat's son. Ah put it in the best sense. Ah'm proud o' ma feyther and what he done, and his loyalty tae his dying day tae the miners and the British warking class. But ah think when ah went intae the mining industry, and got up tae speak, they expected a reiteration o' ma feyther and the way he could express himself on a platform. And that had its effect on me fur many years by being nervous and shaky. Yes, ah think people expected mair fram me than ah possibly gave. But one can only dae their best.

Within all the quotations given so far there can be found an admiration for the older generation. This is found repeatedly in communists' comments. The statements reveal clearly that the past generations have acted as ideal examples of what is expected of members. They establish a precedent of standards for younger men both through the role they have played in Fife's history and the moral values they expressed. Through the passing on of the



significant history, therefore, younger communists learn two interrelated things; the qualities they require to be leaders, and the qualities required to live a 'decent' life. The next quotation highlights the correspondence between political and personal characteristics. One of many similar statements, it is from a 55 year old communist asked to describe his father:-

Ach, ye're gaeing tae make me cry noo! Ma feyther was the greatest man that ah've ever known. He gave me a perception o' the warld that ah will be eternally grateful fur. He was honest. He was dependable. He could analyse si'uations. Common sense, and he was **dedicated**. When he said he would dae something ye could [rely on it]. Noo, hoo many people are there in this life who, if they say tae ye, "Ah will dae that," that ye can put yur hond on yur heart and know it will happen? No' so verra many. If ma ald man said, "Ah will dae that," he'd dae it. And he ayeways wanted tae be sure that **everybody** got their place. Everybody got what they were entitled tae. Verra formal aboot they kindae things. If somebody expressed a wish, who had died or something, that cer'ain things should gae cer'ain places and, although he was a communist, they wanted the priest tae conduct the funeral and all the rest o' it, ma feyther ayeways made sure that everybody got what they were entitled tae and the **proper** thing was done. Verra meticulous and capable. To'ally honest, nae fiddling. **Verra principled. Verra principled.**

The reproduction of radical consciousness was thus based on respect and emulation rather than explicit socialisation. Yet even if fathers do not consciously try to ensure their sons hold their own political beliefs, there is a hope that they will come to these of their own volition. All fathers expressed the opinion that all one can do is point the way, provide an example and see what transpires. The same man speaks of his own four sons, aged between 18 and 30 years, two of whom are Party members, and another a Union official:-

Well, obviously, ah would like them tae have the same kindae political general outlook that **ah've** got. Ah think most people would like that. The ald Sco'ish values o' being **honest**, being **haird-warking**, being men o' their **ward**. These are the things that ah think are important tae learn. Ah would like them tae have ma political outlook, which ah think they've got, and [ma two middle sons] are both developing in the Union. Ah mean, \_\_\_\_'s the Vice Chairman o' his Union branch, \_\_\_\_ is the Youth Delegate. They are both gaeing tae conferences and speaking on resolutions, and ah'm **helping** them wi' that.



Yet despite the close continuance between generations, there are differences in outlook, and many attest to political disagreements with their families. Whilst the sample agreed that their fathers were 'better' men than they are, and were responsible for the improvements that the miners have witnessed in their lives, they have not merely absorbed their fathers' beliefs. Although basic principles hold true, societal change has called forth a refinement in outlooks and tactics. As the following quotation indicates, changing historical circumstances can engender differences of opinion:-

Ah mean, ma feyther used tae give me wee Marxist lectures at times. He used tae sortae take a table and then explain tae me in simple terms the theory o' surplus value, ye know. And he used tae dae wee things like that, which stick wi' ye. And gi' ye wee stories, like, ye know, ye can take a match and **break** it. Then he would hond ye a dozen matches, and ye cannae break **them**. Which was making the point aboot unity. "Unity is Strength". "Each single match can be broken verra easily on its own, but put a dozen matches together and ye cannae break them. Remember that. Unity, see?" So, he's a be'er fella than me. [But] ah think there are differences in outlook. There were differences o' **opinion** in the latter years o' his life. We used tae argue like cat and dog. If onybody had heard us they wouldae thought we were at each other's throats. But we **werenae**. We were **arguing**, because that was his stimulus. Arguing wi' me was his stimulus, and ah played a wee bit o' a Devil's Advocate. But he lived in a different historical period, and its verra difficult tae, fur some people, tae **adapt** tae a new historical period. Just as its difficult noo tae **adapt** tae the realisation that Thatcherism is something **different**. Socie'y is changing. Oor **Party** is changing. It's role has got tae be revalued on where we're gaeing, and people find it haird tae accept that.

As this quotation clearly shows, whilst generational transmission has provided a vital mechanism for political reproduction in Fife, changes in society have led to a disjuncture in certain areas and reorientations in perceptions and tactics have become called into requirement. Changes in the class structure and the industrial and political climate necessitate such a reappraisal. But further, at the material base of the Party in Fife, such changes have eroded the conditions within which the Party has



traditionally operated. Whether members can adjust will clearly affect the Party's future potentiality.

### 8.5 Communism in a Cold Climate.

In earlier chapters we have traced the changing nature of the mining communities in the Fife coalfield. Declining numbers, pits and community base plus increasing affluence and social integration have fundamentally altered the traditional way of life, both positively and negatively. Historically grounded within the industry these changes have critically affected the Party's base. Thus, whilst communism as a fundamental belief system does not change, there is an awareness that changes must be made if the Party is to survive locally given the current social, industrial and political climate. The role and direction of the Party must be reorientated. The old dichotomous views of society, engendered by earlier historical circumstances, have become outmoded. The socio-economically undifferentiated villages of the mining community have largely gone, and with them the applicability of a crude application of Marxist theory. The old vision is expressed by a 75 year old communist who relates the views he came to in the 1920s and 1930s:-

Well, being a Marxist, and ah had tae be a Marxist verra early in ma close contact wi' these ald Marxists like Proudfoot, McArthur and the other people, the Jimmy Hopes and that, ah grew up intae the game. And ah ayeways take the Marxist point o' view that the warking class was brought intae existence by the capitalist class, and they became the potential gravediggers o' the capitalist system. So, in the struggle fur socialism, being a socialist idealist, ah had tae commit masel tae the role the warking class would play. This new class that would diametrically oppose and destroy the socie'y that brought them intae existence. That was the role and, therefore, ah committed masel tae the haired terms o' the struggle in this sense.

This quotation shows a clear adherence to the classical Marxist definitions of the composition of capitalist society and to the historical role of the working class. The younger generation, however, have had to adopt a more complex approach to the problems of attaining socialism. There is a greater awareness of the



complexity of contemporary society and of the hostility of the current political climate to socialist ideals. Having become more assimilated into the wider society, young communist miners view the task, and the problems confronting them today, as being increasingly difficult to achieve. Social integration has brought home to them that they are not in so strong a position as their forefathers believed. Compare the previous quotation with the next, from a 30 year old communist:-

Ah think, furst o' all, the ~~make~~-up o' the warking class has changed. There's less manual warkers. There's less traditional warkers, warking in traditional industries. There's mair pairt-timers, there's mair women warkers, there's mair people on YTS schemes and things like that. So the composition o' the warking class is changing all the time, and in the mining industry, just like onywhere else. What happened in the Soviet Union aifter the '50s, the problems that were exposed in the Soviet Union, and the sortae lack o' a concept o' socialism. When ah used tae hear ma grandfeyther speaking, socialism was an everyday ward. Noo, it's no' like that, because people have tended tae lose the idea o' what socialism really means, what it could achieve fur them. So, its no' an everyday ward in that sense [anymair]. And ah think there are a number o' reasons [fur that]. Furst o' all, the composition o' the warking class has changed, ah think that's a primary reason. Ah think there's been an ideological onslaught tae ~~remove~~ socialism fra' the warking-man's language, and no' just that, but the whole culture o' socialism has been eroded over the years. People dinnae gae tae the Miners' Gala as often as they did. At one time ye used tae have a Miners' Gala in every communi'y. Noo, there's only one, in Edinburgh, ye ken. And even in that cultural sense socialism has been eroded. And then, Thatcher, o' course, has said she wants tae remove it fra' oor thinking.

These changes are thereby perceived as presenting new problems for the maintenance and growth of the Party. All communists interviewed stated that previous strength had been seriously eroded by historical change, and that the Party was struggling to maintain its base in the county. If it is to succeed, it must reorientate itself to adjust to these new conditions and broaden its concerns locally to tackle modern concerns. A leading communist argues how change has weakened the Party locally and the need to find a new path:-

There arenae verra many miners left. Ah mean, the decline o' the Communist Party must be related tae the decline o' the



mining industry, because the base o' the Communist Party in Fife was based around the mining industry, cer'ain conditions that prevailed in the mining industry. And the influence o' the Communist Party has declined in recent years, there's nae doubt aboot that. It's a historic fact, that's related tae the fact that there are noo no' thousands and thousands o' miners in Fife. The miners in Fife are a handful. And the base o' the Communist Party in Fife was based around the mining industry, and the mining villages and so on. That was pairt o' the fabric and that's gone, and the Communist Party has got tae adapt tae that if its gaeing tae survive. Its got tae look at that and say, "Well, that was a period o' history that's verra fine, and verra traditional, and Gallacher was there, but that's noo changed. Noo, how dae we operate in different circumstances?" Ye have tae broaden yur appeal. Ye have tae look at the new developments that are taking place in socie'y. Who are the oppressed? Who are we acting as tribunes fur? Who are the new forces in socie'y? tae quote a cliched phrase. But its a fact. A fact that the Party in Fife was built around the mining industry, the mining villages, the poverty, the unemployment, the struggle fur decent conditions and so on. And that these outstanding people led these movements and attracted people intae the Communist Party.

The erosion of this base is thus seen as requiring two things if the Party is to recapture the initiative; firstly, that it addresses itself to new needs and problems and, secondly, that it attracts new members. The decline of the mining industry means that by the early 1980s not only had the Party declined numerically, but that its remaining base in a handful of pits and the CCW had alienated it from the settlements of Fife. Further, as older men have increasingly left the pits its remaining bases have been without those who could guide the young and recruit new members. It would consequently appear that the Party is no longer a 'natural' organisation to join as the reduction of the miners removes the conducive environment. Crucial to this is that there are no longer so many channels through which the history of the Fife miners may be transmitted, and through this the appeal of the Party. One young miner argues:-

Ah don't think alot o' miners **know** what it was aboot before nationalisation. The mining industry is the youngest industry, talking o' age o' the warkers, in Britain. The average age is something like 34 noo. So ah don't think alot o' people really know what it was like.



Further, this previous concentration on the industry has meant that the Party is no longer clearly visible to the communities. Thus, there is a perceived need to broaden communal involvement. This is especially felt amongst older members who can remember the previous presence. A 73 year old communist argues:-

... ah've been taking pairt in discussions in the leadership o' the Communist Party, and trying tae convince them o' the need tae involve theirsels mair in the village life noo than they've been daeing before. Ye see, one o' the things that miners ha' no' changed is their organisation. Their pits have become bigger, and bigger, and bigger, and the miners are therefore spread oot tae the different communi'ies. And while ye can still get them at the pit-head, it's no' like ge'ing them in the village because ye're no' speaking tae the wives, and the children that're coming up tae wark in the pit in the next year. Ye're no' ge'ing the message hame tae them.

Yet if these factors are creating problems in perpetuating the radical consciousness, there is still a belief that despite the decline of the industry the role of Party members within the community will carry the Party forwards:-

The perpetuation o' communist ideas depends on whether or no' there is a Communist Party that operates and is operating publically, involved in the issues that affect people. And we have ayeways had a group o' people, or a branch o' people who have survived. Who've ayeways been able tae cairry forrad, and that's had alot tae dae wi' individuals. At the moment support is maintained by the role o' individuals within the communi'y, daeing wark on behalf o' the communi'y, who are communists. The people will vote fur a communist who will no' necessarily vote communist, because there is a distinction. There are outstanding individuals.

The ability to sustain the Party, however, crucially depends on attracting followers and recruiting new members in. There may still be found a basic sympathy among younger miners who are not members, such as we have witnessed earlier among older men. One 26 year old unaligned miner states:-

My God. Most o' the things they've come oot wi' ha' been bluidy right, ye know. What's happened in oor industry. And, as ah've been told, communism's the way forrad within the mining industry.



Yet there must also be young miners who are capable of providing the political systematisation for the younger generation to carry it forward in the future. Older members feel that this is possible. One argues:-

If ye see young lads developing and ye can help them tae dae so, then there's a pleasure in that. Ye get pleasure ootae different things in yur life. When ye get tae the veteran stage ye get pleasure ootae seeing people that ye've trained, or helped tae train, developing.... Ye have the Brian Eastons, and the young Brian Russells who are members o' the Communist Party. There's ma ain wee lad coming up. Noo, they are the potential fur the future.... And when ye see people like that **developing**, then ye don't worry tae much aboot if ye're gaeing tae die everything's gaeing tae collapse around ye, ye know. Because the job o' a leader is tae train his successor.

Thus despite hostile conditions there is a belief that the legacy can be reproduced, even should mining die out in Fife. This belief is derived from a conviction that their world view continues to provide them with a framework which enables them to understand the world despite social change, and that they can thus find a path forward and control their lives. A young communist argues:-

... the principles that we want tae **achieve** in socie'y, the sortae be'er life, ye ken, the thinking aboot the communi'y, and the **fighting** fur the communi'y, and the **fighting** fur the people who may be abit disadvantaged, they're all principles that're **within** the Communist Party. And fur **me**, the Communist Party has given me a way o' **thinking**, it's given me a way o' analysing a particular problem. And ah notice it mair wi' members o' the Labour Party that doesnae ha' that. They seem tae flounder a wee bit. They seem tae be **undecided**, mair **unclear** aboot where they're gaeing. And, tae me, that's been the greatest benefit that ah've had through the Communist Party, giving me that kindae thinking. It gives me an idea o' which way we should be gaeing forrad. It gives me an **idea** o' the problem, whether o' the **scale** o' the problem, or the **dimension** o' the problem or whatever. But it also gi's me a way **forrad**, ootae the problem. It gives me a be'er understanding o' what ye're up against. And if ye have a be'er understanding then ye've got a be'er ability tae tackle. So, in that sense, ye **dae** have mair control than maybe somebody that daesnae fully understond the si'uation that they're in.



The benefits on a personal level for Party members, therefore, are that they are given this framework within which to understand their world and thus maintain some measure of degree over it. They feel themselves, through their politics, to be knowledgeable actors capable of purposive action; communism gives a sense of purpose and control. It can also provide them with a source of optimism that gives them energy to continue despite local decline. Communism is thereby a source of faith. Alec Maxwell, who has stood four times as Parliamentary Candidate for the CP in Fife expresses this well:-

A local minister once... said tae me, "Hoo dae ye keep gaeing, Mr. Maxwell?", he says. "There ye are, week aifter week, and ye're ge'ing lambasted in the press. Ye stond fur council and ye're being defeated. Ye stond fur Parliament and ye're being leathered. Ye're being attacked fra' every side. What is it that keeps ye gaeing?" Ah said, "Well, ye see, Reverend, ma horizons extend beyond the boundaries o' Cowdenbeath. It's right that ah get abit o' a tanking in the papers and so on, but yoo compare that tae what ma comrades in Vietnam are ge'ing, or in South Africa, or in other pairts o' the world," ah said. "It's really nothing but a few pin-pricks at me. Ah can look around the world and see the ideas that ah believe in advancing on a world scale," ah said. "And that's what keeps me gaeing. Because ah know ma side's winning. Whatever ah'm suffering doesnae really ma'er, because ma side's winning. Socialism is coming. Ah might no' see it, but the system ah believe in is advancing on a world scale." So, that's what keeps me gaeing. A perspective o' life and the world.

### 8.6 Conclusion.

This chapter has sought to understand the role of political factors in the systematisation and direction of the history of the Fife miners by concentrating on the activities of the Communist Party, and the reasons why it gained prominence in the coalfield. It has been argued that the source of its appeal has provided the mechanism for its survival. Rooted within the locality and articulating the needs of the mining communities, the communists played a major role in the coalescing of the value system and needs of the miners' lives. Communism interpreted their lives and located explanations within a total world view, embracing diagnosis and prescription. Consequently, we can understand the



comments by Stedman Jones and others noted in the introduction that it is the political sphere which gives shape and direction to inchoate thoughts and grievances. It is this sense that communism, by its embeddedness within the community, is almost a cultural, rather than political, mechanism.

Further, by being largely drawn from the communities themselves, the communists had a legitimacy behind their leadership, for the known quality of local leaders meant there was an identity of interests between leadership and rank-and-file. This rootedness had two consequences; firstly, leaders became seen as typifications of the system they espoused yet, at the same time, that system was seen in terms of personal attributes. It has been argued that it is the individualistic, situated quality of the communists' base in the county which was a source of strength and of weakness. It enabled the legitimation of leadership and the transmission of ideas over time through local leaders, but has meant that the decline of its communal base and the drop in membership associated with that means that this may have reduced its ability to carry forward into the future.

Communism, through the role played by Party members in the miners' struggles is thus an interactive factor in the form and content of the historical legacy. It is a part of the objective history of 'facts' upon which miners draw and, as such, is part of the precedents used to understand life. It has also played a part, therefore, in providing the frame of meaning within which events, historical and present, are understood. Thus it has both shaped the past by action, and shapes past, present and future by analysis. By participating in the history of the area the Party has become irredeemably bound to what the Fife miners are, and see themselves as being. As such, its effects far outweigh any numerical strength. It is a resource both for identity and belief through this historical role: it is both a form of organisation and a vehicle for expression.



However, we have also looked at what meanings the Party has for members. This aspect has not concentrated on the content of the ideology, which can be seen in other chapters when communists speak of other issues, but relates to what it gives its adherents. We have heard how communism gives a sense of direction and purpose to communist miners, and enables them to feel a sense of control over their lives. Whilst the requirements of the Party are held to have changed, there is a correspondence between the comments of both old and young on this issue. For the young is added the sense of being part of a particularistic past, dominated by heroic figures to whom they can look for guidance. The understandings of the past also show us how the ideas of the young are determined by their theoretical orientation. It is a significant history offering an interpretation crucially interconnected to their theoretical beliefs, and which thereby acts to reinforce those beliefs. It has appeared that what is of significance is how the history of the Fife miners is used by both young and old alike, and the indicators their statements give about its role in sustaining political beliefs; for the accounts of their history read like a testament of faith. The quotations from non-Party members, however, have seemed to give some legitimacy to the statements of the communists, and to have supplied evidence of an agreement about the Party's historical role.

The comments raised enable us to assess the work of Newton. It has been confirmed by the Fife sample that most joined the Party because it was seen as being that which was most willing to fight for the community. They came to the Party through people already known to them, often familial members. Many are self-educated, of a reflexive nature and display a strong ability for coherent analysis. They are also, in accordance with Newton, people who believe in the ability of man to shape his destiny and affect social change, and who draw strength from the international developments of the socialist movement. However, whilst agreeing with Newton that they are pragmatists in many senses, there would appear to be a greater degree of vision of an alternative future than Newton's definition of 'non-utopian' would warrant, and it



would be mistaken to describe them merely as militant trade-unionists. Overall, therefore, Newton's analysis of Party members would tend to agree with the evidence given.

It must be said, however, that whilst this chapter has concentrated on the Communist Party in Fife this is not to argue that it is the only socialist organisation in the county, nor the only form of potential expression, and we have noticed the presence of other parties; whether the ILP, SFD, SDF, Labour Party or whatever. What the Party has achieved is to capitalise on the basic beliefs of the miners over time. A commitment to socialism may be expressed in many ways, and find outlet in many different parties, or even in none, for many of the sample are unaligned. Different organisations could have captured the mining communities and articulated the latent beliefs therein. What the Party managed to do in Fife was to capture a disproportionately large place for itself within the mining communities in relation to other parties during the upheavals of the interwar years. What is particularistic is that by securing acknowledgement of their leadership, through the commitment and work of activists, the CP both achieved an immutable place within Fife's history and secured the potential for reproducing this over time. In this way it has peculiarly affected the nature of the historical legacy in the county and may, indeed, be responsible for the contemporary nature of other political parties in the county by colouring political perceptions and, through challenging Labour at elections, keeping Fife more left-wing than other areas.

As the only place to have had a sustained a communist trade union in Britain, and to have perpetuated a relatively strong communist base over time, the Fife miners thereby occupy a distinctive place within British labour history. The Party must consequently be seen as responsible for the particularistic legacy of radicalism found in the county. Yet the modern period has seen the weakening of its base in Fife due to industrial and social change, which has fostered an increasing awareness that the Party must respond positively to recapture the initiative. Whether it could continue



its appeal and prove relevant to the continuing struggles of the miners would be discovered during the miners' longest dispute, the 1984-85 strike.



## CHAPTER NINE.

## THE 1984-85 STRIKE: LIVING UP TO THE PAST?

9.1 Introduction.

The previous chapters have served to highlight how changing socio-economic and political circumstances in Fife meant that by 1984 the Fife coalfield was ill-equipped to embark on what many soon realised would be a long industrial struggle. The mining industry no longer dominated the county in the way it had done formerly, and this had had corresponding effects on the strength of the traditional support systems of the local mining communities. The industry was no longer the major source of employment for local inhabitants and not, therefore, so vital to their interests. Industrial decline and the changing nature of local pits, with the advent of large, cosmopolitan productive units, meant that the collectivism of the old-style pit villages was under threat, with crucial potential consequences for strike activities. Lastly, the divorce of the pits from the villages had served to sever the intimate connection between community and the Unions, which no longer dominated the concerns and activities of the mining families in the way it had done in, for example, the 1926 strike: the last prolonged national miners' dispute.

Yet, despite these structural changes to the Fife mining industry, at the beginning of the strike the miners were 100% solid, and an estimated 92-95% would return en masse in March 1985; the majority of the remainder only returning to work in the last few weeks[1]. As in other areas, organisational bases were quickly established around the coalfield: arranging and sending out pickets; collecting and distributing funds and provisions; organising social and political events, and getting babies born to miners' wives during the year 'adopted' by workers in Dundee, through the provision of funds and material necessities.



Paralleling the activities of the local Councils of Action of the inter-war period, 10 Strike Centres were set-up around the county coordinated from a Central Headquarters in Dysart on the east coast. It was in these that activities centred, plans made and executed, analysis given and morale sustained. As elsewhere, the stresses of the strike were intense. Some marriages became embittered, and occasionally collapsed, as tempers flared, morale fluctuated and families sunk deeper into debt. For activists, the Strike Centres became second homes as they worked around the clock; suffering physical exhaustion, mental fatigue and despondency. It was a demanding year, especially for the Seafield men who were to be out for 13 months, having already been on strike since February 1984 on a local dispute.

But even though it was a period of hard work, material hardship and periods of depression, the sample all agree that it was also a great year. Once again the communities drew together for mutual aid as all sections rallied around the strike. The Union became integrated once more into the communities due to the exigencies of the dispute. Further it was a time in which personal inner resources were discovered, developed and tested - whether individuals found themselves confronting new ideas, suddenly addressing public meetings around Britain for the first time, or improving their golf handicaps during periods of relaxation in what turned out to be a fine summer.

Thus despite the debilitated state of the industry all of the Fife miners interviewed found the resources and conviction to sustain themselves through a year of unprecedented struggle and in the face of the growing awareness of the inevitability of defeat. There was not a uniformity of response among the sample, however, for some were involved to a far greater extent than others in the activities of the strike. As such, rather than attempt a descriptive examination of the dispute, attention shall focus on three aspects; firstly, how the historical legacy was mobilised in support of the strike; secondly, the major orientations to the



beginning, changing circumstances and end of the dispute and, thirdly, how radical and non-radical miners responded to events.

This orientation must be seen in relation to the previous five chapters, which have examined general experiential factors which have played a major part in the formation of identity and consciousness among the sample. These constitute areas of life which have served as mechanisms to promote radical consciousness over time, and which have provided the grounding for political understandings. In these areas the miners interviewed have shown an overall broad agreement in response, although articulated more politically by radicals, which can be held to form the substance of the miners' world view. The following two chapters will provide an analysis of how these objective and subjective mechanisms interact with spatio-temporally located events, and yet how this contemporary actuality may then act to reproduce or transform consciousness. Major emphasis will be laid on the importance of historical and political understandings to this process. It is through this approach that we can reach a fuller understanding of the inherent dynamism and complexity of radical consciousness, and how this may be affected by changing spatio-temporal circumstances in radical regions.

## 9.2 Mobilising the Legacy.

In Chapter Three we saw how the Fife miners relate their radicalism to the historical legacy within the county; that is, that they see themselves as militant due to the historical precedent established by previous generations. Yet in the 1984-85 strike, this cultural reproduction could be noted in two other main areas; firstly in the support of the mining and non-mining communities for the strike and, secondly, in the role played by older generations in reviving the legacy due to the relevance of past struggles to the concerns of contemporary miners during the dispute.



Despite the post-war trend of communal decline and the increasing separation of the pits from the mining villages and towns, when the strike call went out, the Fifers from the coalfield area rallied behind the miners. Thus, although mining is no longer the predominant source of employment in Fife, sympathy for the miners surfaced in local settlements. It is in this sense that one can perceive the general historical legacy in operation in the county, for support is grounded within the historic importance of coal in the area. The sample all argued that Fifers will rally because so many have former familial ties to the industry. Whilst hostility could sometimes be found in the locality, both radical and non-aligned miners agree that Fifers were generally more sympathetic than those outwith the mining areas. One 33 year old member of the Labour Party argues:-

Well, Fife, tae me, ah think if ye spoke tae most people in Fife, the vast majori'y o' them, 60%, maybe 70% are o' mining stock. So they've got that feeling, "Ma grandfeyther was a miner, ah ken what it's like," type-thing. Ma feyther was a miner, ma feyther's feyther was a miner. Ma mother's feyther was a miner. [Ma wife's] feyther was a miner, his feyther was a miner. Her mother's feyther was a miner. Ah dare say alot o' folk arround here are like that. Their grandparents, their parents were all fra' mining stock so they've still got that mining communi'y spirit and feeling.

Despite changing socio-economic conditions, therefore, the close historical association with the pits in Fife provided a tradition which could be mobilised during the strike. With the demise of its mining base, it is the perpetuation of this legacy over time in Fife which facilitates its usage at times when circumstances so require; for it exists within the cultural repertoire of the region through its location within familial history. Consequently, Fifers appear to respond not necessarily on the basis of personal contact with the industry, but because their backgrounds locate them within the occupational community and identity. A communist in his 30s relates:-

In this area the decline o' the pits **changes** the communi'y, ah mean, it daesnae end the communi'y. The communi'y continues, but the communi'y's changed. The militancy's still there, when the need arises. What pleased me aboot Cowdenbeath was the fact that when the strike call went oot it wasnae just the



miners in the toon, ye know, that rallied tae the call but the toon itsel. Because the toon realised that although we've got nae pits, alot o' men are still employed in the pits, and the tradition o' militancy come tae the surface. And the toon stood firm wi' the miners, which pleased me nae end at all, ken. Ah mean, we've only lost oor pits in living memory. Ah mean, ah can mind the pits gaeing and ah'm only 33. The tradition's still there. Alot o' the alder men are fra' mining. Ah mean, ye'll no' gae tae a hoose in this area and no' find somebody who's no' got, at present or in the recent past, somebody in their femily has got something tae dae wi' mining.

If this quotation shows how a tradition can be activated in what is no longer a predominantly conducive environment, however, it also indicates the ways in which this may affect miners according to their political beliefs. It is among non-aligned miners that one finds most evidence of a lack of perception of sympathy, or an acceptance of support as a purely practical phenomenon. Note the following quotations from unaligned men, one in his 40s, the other in his 20s:-

Ah found oot during the strike that people, they're no' lang in turning on ye. There's alot o' guid people, but there's alot o' bad people. Ah would say [Fifers] werenae tae bad, like, [but] there was alot o' people who wouldnae lift a hond tae help ye. In this street especially, like.

Fifers are mair sympathetic but ye ayeways get a fringe group that arenae. [They showed their support] by gi'ing us money tae keep the strike gaeing.

Whilst both of these men acknowledge public support, it is among politicised miners that this takes on a more abstract conceptualisation; that is, that this sympathy is seen as supporting Marxist arguments of unity among the working class and the sense of class conflict between broad structural alignments. Thus, although for all miners it was communal backing which was a crucial source of strength, for politically-aligned miners this was fitted within the framework of meaning within which they formulate belief and became symptomatic of the veracity of this. One 30 year old communist recalls the feeling communal support



generated:-

In '84 and '85 there was a tremendous movement in the communities. Ah think it was almost like a resistance, when ye're under occupation sortae thing and people rally round. That was unbelievable because it was the whole community. Ye went intae the street wi' yur collecting can, pensioners would put a £10 note in yur can. Another pensioner might only put a can o' beans in yur trolley, but that was all they could afford, ye ken. But it was that community pulling together tae sustain what is, proportionally, only a verra small pairt o' a to'al community. Fur the furst time ye saw the whole community coming together and helping ye. And people were coming intae the Strike Centre who just happened tae be passing. One o' the furst tasks ah was asked tae dae was make a no'ice fur the Strike Centre, and ah got the stuff ootae the Workshops, ah stole it, and we made this big no'ice, ken, "NUM STRIKE HEADQUARTERS". And it was great, big letters, maybe a foot high or something, and we stuck it ootside the door. And people used tae gae past and they just saw the no'ice and they would come in and drop some money in, or they would come in and ask hoo it was gaeing. What could they dae or things like that. So people drew together, and people helped each other, and it was great.

As we can see from this statement, material and moral support provided a strong resource upon which to build morale and especially strengthened younger miners who largely had little experience of the close-knit nature of communities of the past. In this sense, it was a practical lesson in the immanent socialism of the community of a previous era. A 37 year old Labour Party member continues in a similar vein:-

Well, ah can mind ma dad telling us aboot if somebody had a pint o' milk and yoo had nain, ye'd get half o' o' it. But that went on withoot a strike in '26 or in they days, because the miners did ha' nothing.... and that's what it was like during that strike. Ah mean, there was nothing closer than during the year o' that strike. It was unbelievable what it was like in a village like this one. Ah mean, naebody wanted fur onything. If a boy up there had it, and yoo didnae, he'd gi' ye half o' it. It was that sortae a'itude.

In this sense the legacy was mobilised within the communities in two ways; firstly, by drawing the community together despite social change, and secondly, by renewing the relevance and legitimacy of the mutuality of an earlier period. Yet the rekindling of community spirit also served as a source of strength



to younger miners, which found a particular chord among politically-motivated miners who saw in this the verification of political ideologies.

Yet these points also relate to the second major element, for many of the younger miners, as has been indicated, had not experienced long-term industrial action nor the severity of individual and communal hardships which had characterised the inter-war years. Although there have always been localised, short-term strikes in the area, therefore, there was little first-hand experience of sustained organisation and hardship. Even among the older members of the employed sample only five had had organisational experience during the comparatively short national strikes of the 1970s. Thus the historical legacy had, of necessity, to be drawn upon in an educational sense as well as a communal one; that is, practical advice was as important as communal support. This was facilitated by the eagerness of retired miners to help in whatever way they could, and thus participate in the affairs of the occupational group once again. A 37 year old Labour Party member argues:-

We used tae get alot o' retired men doon in the Strike Centres daeing the wark, like. Making the dinners. Help tae make dinners. They'd dae **onything** just tae help. They **wanted** tae be active, because they could remember what it was like fur them. Ah mean, alot o' them were on strike in '74 and '72, and they were the guys. They were the boys then. Ah mean, ah was younger then. They were the boys then that were the **leaders** o' the communi'y, fur the strike, like. And they felt they were ge'ing left oot, and they were **dying** tae get active, and they did.

Whilst being an important source of practical help, the older miners also gave advice to the strikers. Those with experience of the organisational necessities of past conflict had much to offer. In this way they served to reproduce the historical legacy to the younger generation. One unaligned miner in his 20s explains how they drew on the expertise of ex-miners in the initial stages of the strike for advice on the practicalities of organisation:-

Ah think [the importance o' the ald boys was] morale pairtly, and pairtly advice. The likes o' oor Chairman fur advice. In fact, he was redundant at the time. He was made redundant and



he took the money. That was when we were ge'ing them oot over 55, ye see. And we called him in tae get some advice, ye know. Hoo tae stairt aff and all that, ye ken, and then stairted the ball rolling fra' there. So it was really fram an ald man that things stairted aff. Somebody who'd been through it before, ye know. [Organisation] wouldnae ha' been so quick done withoot they men. Ah think it would ha' been verra sca'ery and no' verra well-organised.

This interaction between the generations thus served both advisers and advised; that is, whilst educating the younger generations in the necessities of industrial conflict, at the same time it legitimised the role of the older generations' experiences as of continuing relevance in the contemporary era. Yet if the strike enabled the mobilisation of the historical legacy as the community and industry drew together because of the functional prerequisites of the strike, one must also count for the nature of that reproduction. Much of the advice and support was of a practical nature, as we have seen, but it also took a specific form. The particularistic legacy of the Fife coalfield is such that communal revival served to reaffirm the past identity and instill into younger miners the specific nature of Fife's past and militant traditions.

If the return of major conflict necessitated the mobilisation of past tradition, the situated utilisation of this drew upon a relevant significant history which legitimated an oppositional view of both past and present and, through this, Fife's militant identity. The particular orientation of the past operationalised during the strike, as examples or standards, acted to confirm an understanding of the past as conflictual, and also reaffirmed the relevance of the normative value system that this calls forth. This awareness of the past, and of necessary beliefs and actions required to deal with conflict, came increasingly to light during the strike through both explicit advice or implicit statement. One 33 year old member of the Labour Party recalls some advice he was given by an ex-miner, and which, he argued, he would have been pleased to follow if circumstances had permitted:-

... when ye're brought-up through a mining tradition, ye talk about different si'uations that ye've obviously been through.



We had an ald boy, Tam Riley, who's retired actually, and he was never ootae the Strike Centre. And he used tae say when the two scabs went by in this area, "Ye should be gaeing doon tae their hooses and ge'ing the bastards." And this was an ald boy, Tam Riley, who was active in the Strike Centre. He helped in the kitchen and that, and he was oot on picket-lines as well.... And that was what he was saying, "Yes dinnae ken what yes are daeing. See, if it was the '26 strike, we'd be doon tae their fucking hoose and get in and tie them up, ken."

If this is an implicit statement of the types of oppositional activity historically engaged upon, it also displays the presence of an implicit value system required by industrial action. It demonstrates, through the judgements of those who deny collective responsibility, the necessity of solidarity. It is for this reason that the 'scab' is the object of almost hysterical hostility on the part of the miners. They relate many stories of those who have scabbed in the past, and the consequences such individuals met with. By this remembrance an unspoken reminder is given of the potential repercussions that will happen to those tempted to such action in the present or future. In communities which stress the historic, and continuing, relevance of collective mutuality, stories of the stigma attached to those perceived as acting against communal principles convey that the penalties of social ostracism are harsh. Miners emphasise that those who act individually outwith the group induce collective failure; for this, the withdrawal of collective support and membership of the occupational group is the consequence. By reiterating such stories during the strike, therefore, reaffirmation is made of collective values, and thus such values are reproduced. An extract from a conversation between two miners and one of their wives, all in their 30s, about scabs in the 1926 strike, expresses this clearly:-

[Miner 1] There was a si'uation arose in oor village, we had two scabs gaeing back tae their wark. Well, there was three actually. And the whole village turned oot practically tae line the main streets. And there was li'le ald boys up at the Club standing when the scab-van come along wi' the polis and that, and they were gi'ing them abuse etc.. And this ald boy was standing, "Scabby bastards." And this other ald boy turned roond tae him and said, "Hey, sir. Dinnae yoo talk. Yoo scabbed in the '26 strike." And that ald boy remembered him tae that day. He had never forgotten.



[Miner 2] That just reminds me. Men used tae collect fur the Christmas appeal fur the kids in November, and this young loddie came in fra' the Workshops, ye know, tae tally the money up at the end o' the day. And we were si'ing there and he says, "Something funny happened today." He said he was collecting wi' his tin, and some ald boy came up and put a poond in his box. And he thanked him, like. He says, "Thanks fur the poond." And he put the poond in, and this other ald boy's shouting, "Is that conscience money, ye bastard?" And he says, "Tha ald boy put the money in," he says. "And his heid went doon," he says. "And he walked away." And this other ald fella came up tae the box and says, "'26. Warked." That's right. That young loddie couldnae believe it!

[Wife] That's right. That's what's happening noo. Ah mean, they'll get cast oot fur the rest o' their bluidy days. They'll get cast off fur the rest o' their living days. It'll never get away fra' them. That's them branded fur life, like.

[Miner 1] Which ah hope isnae lang.

Such stories perform two services. They both reaffirm for older men their particular sense of the past and the miners' identity, and they inform younger miners of certain historic values. Yet if this conflictual and mutualistic sense of the past is part of what has been called the immanent socialism of the miners' lives, the overtly political part of the historical legacy is, as has been seen, intimately connected to the role of the Communist Party, which has provided the leadership locally. Both the leaders and the Party members have played a vital role in both shaping the understandings of the past on which the miners draw, but the leadership also establishes precedents for future leaders. Whilst, as we saw in Chapter Eight, the base of the Party has been eroded with the rundown of the industry, the tradition of communist leadership and Party activity in the past provided both theoretical and practical guidance for contemporary membership. As such, this element of the particular legacy of the Fife miners could be found in the Party's activities during the 1984-85 strike. Their role as activists has thus reproduced itself. A quotation from a Party member in Cowdenbeath illustrates how the past acts forward to younger generations:-

Well, ah keep coming back tae this communist thing, but the people who've led the Fife miners have been the communists over the years. They have ayeways provided the main core o'



## NUM DYSART STRIKE CENTRE

# A MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE OF FIFE

After 10 months over 95% of Fife's miners are still on strike, despite hardship and poverty, Coal Board propaganda and bribery, and the harsh use of the police and the Courts against them.

*Why — What's it all about?*

## IT'S ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE COAL INDUSTRY

### THE NCB's OBJECTIVES

- \* To close 70 pits and eliminate 70,000 jobs including half of Scotland's pits and two workshops.
- \* To concentrate on 70 super pits in mid-England and then sell them off to private coal owners.

### THE NUM's OBJECTIVES

- \* To protect pits, jobs and communities and avoid even greater unemployment.
- \* A Plan for Coal which guarantees investment in existing pits with reserves, and for new sinkings to replace pits nearing exhaustion.

### WHY NOT A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT?

Yes — but the Coal Board refuse to do so. The miners have no demands on the table. It's the Coal Board who have demanded pit closures and it is they who have always broken off negotiations.

Throughout the dispute Thatcher has prevented a settlement. The Government wants to break the NUM as a prelude to weakening the whole Trade Union Movement. So McGregor's hands have been tied to his boss.

### "THE WELL LAID SCHEMES . . ."

The Government planned this confrontation well in advance to try and smash the NUM. On 27th May 1978 the "Ridley Report" declared that a Tory Government should:

- Build-up coal stocks, particularly at power stations.
- Make contingency plans for the import of coal.
- Encourage hauliers to recruit non-Union drivers.

- Introduce dual oil/coal-firing in all power stations.
- Establish a large mobile squad of police to deal with picketing.
- Cut off money supply to strikers and make the Union finance them.

By March 1984 these steps had been taken — then closure announced which sparked off the strike.

## HOW CAN THE STRIKE BE ENDED?

### THE NCB WAY

To break the strike by encouraging and bribing scabs with false promises of job security or redundancy. This results in men working without Union representation and will create permanent divisions within the pits and the communities after the strike.

### THE NUM WAY

To get round the table and achieve a negotiated and honourable settlement, preserving the unity of the miners and future harmony in the pits within a secure coal industry.

### WE SAY TO THE PEOPLE OF FIFE

The NUM's way to end this strike is commonsense. Our members have stood firm in support of their Union. They went out together and they should go back together. Continue to give your support to the miners but also demand that the Coal Board get back to the negotiating table.

End this tremendous waste of public money and the massive damage not only to the British economy but the social fabric of our society.

Ensure that you and whatever organisation you belong to — Trade Union, Council, Political Party, Churches — joins in messages to the Prime Minister.

**NEGOTIATIONS NOW FOR A FAIR SETTLEMENT TO THE MINERS' STRIKE**



leaders. In the biggest pit in Fife, Wullie Clarke, Johnnie Neilson, two leading communists. The Workshops, the delegates were communists. Ah mean, oor local Strike Commi'ee, o' the ten on the Strike Commi'ee, there were seven members o' the Communist Party who directed the way in which the local struggle was conducted. And **that** has been the element in Fife that wasnae elsewhere. There has been this influence historically through the Moffats, McArthurs, the Jimmy Millers, the Wullie Clarkes and Johnnie Neilsons. The young lads who've come up as communist leadership. And if ye read aboot the strike and hoo the propaganda was conducted, ah mean, it was conducted in a different way here. Well, ah don't know whether ye no'iced those great, big adverts that the Coal Board took oot, pu'ing their case tae the people. Well, Fife was the only area in which the **miners** put oot another full page answering the case in the same public way. That was in Fife and wasnae done elsewhere. Big pages in the newspapers **answering** the same kindae things.

This quotation clearly relates the political stance of the Fife miners to the historical role played by the CP. It is in this sense that one can see how the past activities of the Party have become an implicit element within the repertoire of historical knowledge drawn upon in the strike to make sense of, and deal with, the confrontation; that is, it is a part of the sense of history of the region which was reproduced in, and by, younger generations. This tradition of radical activity has acted to establish a precedent for political and experiential possibilities. It is for this reason that we can understand the comment of a young communist miner, who seeks to explain the overall solidarity of the Fife miners during the strike:-

... one o' the reasons there was so few scabs during the miners' strike in Fife, and those that did scab tended tae scab in the last few weeks o' the strike, was because o' the **historic importance** o' this militant struggle that's been fur years in Fife.

It is argued, therefore, that it was this sense of the past, as we saw also in Chapter Three, based on hardship and conflict, which provided a major source for the framing of meaning and actions during the course of the dispute. This can be found both among the miners themselves, but also among other sections of the community who had an affinity with the miners. As such, the legacy was mobilised on two levels, one experiential and the other



## NUM DYSART STRIKE CENTRE

# A MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE OF FIFE

## WHO IS PROLONGING THE STRIKE?

Since we last spoke to you over 95% of Fife miners have remained on strike in defence of their jobs, their pits and their communities.

In spite of NCB propaganda, the miners have stayed loyal to their Union even if after 11 months on strike, they suffer poverty and hardship. No other men and women have endured so much — and remained steadfast.

## THERE MUST BE A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT

This strike can only be ended by a honourable settlement. We have sacrificed too much for too long to surrender now. And yet the Tories persist on trying to starve us back to work. The NUM want to settle this strike by negotiation and so do most of the NCB Management. All sections of the British public, including the Churches, are also urging negotiations.

**NO PRE-CONDITIONS FOR TALKS —  
SAY THE NUM  
ONLY THE GOVERNMENT OPPOSE AN  
AGREED SETTLEMENT**

The NUM have made it clear they will enter negotiations without pre-conditions — leaving room for wide-ranging discussions. But the Coal Board, under Government orders, wanted written pre-conditions they set down at the negotiating table. They still believe they can break the strike by a drift back to work.

It is a fact that every miner who returns to work now is helping the Government and delaying the resumption of talks.

**THE GOVERNMENT IS TYING THE COAL BOARD'S  
HANDS**

However they denied it in the past, everybody can now see clearly it is the Government who are stopping the settlement. From the start they set out, not to tackle the problems of the Coal Industry, but to destroy the NUM. They have used bribery, intimidation, the Police and the Courts. They have cut Social Security and wasted £5,000 million of public money to break the strike — and they have failed! But still they pursue their vendetta against the miners, no matter the damage to the economy, reflected in the plunge of the pound to an all-time low, and the bitter divisions in our society.

The Tories are trying to achieve the impossible — to smash the NUM — and the British people are paying dearly for it.

## IT IS THE GOVERNMENT WHO ARE PROLONGING THE STRIKE FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES

**TO OUR MEMBERS WE SAY: —**

Stand firm — no return to work until we all go back with an honourable settlement — including our members who have been sacked.

**TO THE PEOPLE OF FIFE WE SAY: —**

Continue your support for the miners — but demand an end to Government interference and the resumption of negotiations.

**SETTLE THE STRIKE NOW — BY NEGOTIATIONS!**



ideological. Combined with a belief in the justice of their claims to be acting for the protection of jobs and communities all the Fife miners in the sample remained solid until the end. Yet within the year there were three major points at which perceptions of the strike underwent change and which, whilst not breaking resolve, coloured attitudes to the direction the dispute was taking. It was as the year progressed that political beliefs became more central to the ability to analyse the strike and sustain morale.

### 9.3 The Off.

All sections of the sample agree that at the beginning of the strike morale and faith in the dispute ran high. Looking back to the national strikes of the 1970s, much of the initial optimism was grounded in the belief of the strength and power of the NUM. For younger miners, brought up to believe in the invincibility of the Union, that the miners, by industrial strength, could topple governments, this encouraged faith in victory. One 24 year old unaligned miner recalls:-

We thought we were a law unto oorsel because in '72 and '74, ye see, wi' sheer muscle power we crushed the government. And alot o' people thought, when we walked oot in '84, that we were gaeing tae crush them again. If we stuck 5,000 pickets in a huddle we were gaeing tae shut the whole country doon. And we could dae it, ken. It was a sortae romantic thing. Still talking like 1974. "Away tae the power stations and shut everything doon."

Yet it was an optimism based on ignorance. By 1984 the reputation of the miners far outweighed the reality. The 'muscle power' was greatly diminished; the workforce was unprepared for a long struggle and largely inexperienced due to the loss of older men who had left through redundancy, and they were unaware of the strength of the opposition. The miners, therefore, entered the dispute blindly, and in many ways without thought or preparation. A 27 year old communist reflects on the initial stages:-

Ah think that the miners, at the beginning o' the strike, they were thrown intae a si'uation that they didnae know what they



were up against, they didnae know hoo lang it was gaeing tae last, and they didnae ha' time tae think.

Despite this, the Fife miners quickly erected an organisational framework to deal with the exigencies that the strike would require. One unaligned miner in his 20s, whom at that time was a Union official states:-

It was verra organised. It was quite well organised. Even fra', like, the stairt o' the strike it was quite well organised. Previous tae the strike we had mee'ings. They had a mee'ing at the Dubbie where we decided tae meet wi' Seafield, then arranged the Strike Centre, the Central Strike Centre at Dysart. Then, when they came in we said, "Right, what areas are yoo fra'?" "Ah'm fra' Glenrothes," right. So they said, "Right. Yoo gae tae the CISWO and see if ye can get a hall in the CISWO, and we'll get a soup kitchen gaeing there," ye know. It was quite well organised. And the likes o' the Secretary, he came fra' Cardenden. He went and seen about a Strike Centre in his area, ye know. And like John Beal and that, ye know. They'd gae and see about a Strike Centre in Temple Hall fur the soup-kitchens. So in that way it was organised. And then it was just drawing people in, and ge'ing people available fur picket-duty, ge'ing the money together and things like that, ye know. It was quite haird wark fur alot o' people.

Yet if the Union soon established organisational activities and institutions, the Strike Centres with more politically-active members soon realised that it was also necessary to mount a coherent political campaign to guide the strike in addition to the practicalities. For communist miners there would appear to have been a clearer understanding of the ramifications of the strike, and a perceived need to provide a clear direction for activities and political education for miners. One 30 year old communist talks of how Party members saw the beginnings of the strike:-

Ah can mind, and this is one o' the distinctions between the Communist Party and the Labour Party, the furst week o' the strike ah was doon the High Street. [Ma wifel] was there, Geordie Cairn, the communist, was there, and Alec Maxwell was there. The whole Communist Party branch in Cowdenbeath was doon there, all the communists. And we were shouting, "Help feed the sterving miners!" That was the furst week o' the strike and we still had a wage coming the following week! But it was because we had a political idea... that this strike would gae on fur alot langer than a couple o' weeks. And we



were daeing the imput, food, collecting money on a regular basis. And, in fact, ah think Cowdenbeath branch o' the Communist Party was the furst organisation in Britain tae actively collect food. So there was that kindae commitment coming fra' the Communist Party, in a local sense, that the Labour Party just lacked to'ally. In fact, when ye look at what happened in the Strike Centre, we saw the need, furst o' all, the Strike Commi'ee was made up 75% communists and the rest was Labour Party and SNP, and we saw the need, right at the beginning tae have a separate political mee'ing, separate fra' the Strike Commi'ee. So the communists met oorsels. In fact, we met the furst day o' the strike, the monday, and we discussed what tactics should be, what the priorities were and hoo we'd best gae aboot it. And at that verra furst mee'ing we took a decision that we would ha' a political mee'ing in the Strike Centre every week. Because what we realised was there would be a lack o' an injection o' politics. We would get involved in the day-tae-day running, the sustaining and feeding o' people, but we wouldnae get involved in the politics. And we realised the onslaught fra' the media that would happen. So we had a political mee'ing every friday and we invited, ken, different leaders fra' the trade-union movement. We also invited church leaders. And there was a district election during the strike, and we invited people fra' different political pairties tae speak.

The above two quotations clearly indicate that the perception of the strike, from the beginning, was different among radicals and non-radicals, with a more immediate grasp of the broader political dimensions among those with a coherent radical world view. It is among the more radical sections of the sample that we can find explicitly political accounts, enabled by their adherence to radical political belief systems, and a greater understanding of the direction and weaknesses of the miners' strike. If, however, the Party realised the political magnitude of the strike, and played a large part in the systematic education of the miners locally through political meetings and activities, it was during the course of the dispute that it became obvious that the Party was no longer operating in the same conducive environment as that in which had existed during its rise to local prominence in the 1920s and 1930s. It was the declining importance of the local stage which was to leave the Party impotent in an organisational sense, although crucial for the framework of analysis and the sustaining of morale and vision among Party members, in the months



during which the possibility of defeat became crystallised into certainty.

#### 9.4 Perceiving the Handicap.

It was the mobilisation of the myth of the miners' strength at the beginning of the strike that was in many ways responsible for the failure to confront the strike adequately. Wielding the victorious image of 1974, the miners had **dwelt** on rather than learnt from that success. They accepted the glory without seeing how circumstances had changed. In this way 1974, the miners' greatest victory, was also their greatest defeat, for it led them into 1984 with outmoded perceptions. The Conservative government, whom as we saw in an earlier chapter was devising new plans from the mid-1970s, was soon perceived to have learnt from the past even though the miners had not. Indeed, soon, though perhaps not quickly enough, some began to see the harshness and determination of the government as precisely **due** to 1974. The miners' willingness to dwell in the past, therefore, was a weakness, and they failed to understand until the event that it was a past which required 'retribution'. A communist in his 50s argues:-

Well, obviously, it's a government that represents, this is rather cliché-ridden, a certain class in society, and they ha' done their job! If there's one thing about them, they had worked out their strategy for dealing wi' the miners **verra** carefully, **verra** well, and they had organised their troops. That's one thing, ye've got tae hold it tae them, they had learnt lessons fra' the past. They werenae like Arthur fighting the strike in 1984 wi' the tools they'd fought the strike in 1974. They had learnt lessons. They knew what they had tae dae and they did it. We're dealing wi' a **verra** clever enemy. Who **dae** learn lessons. Who **dae** organise their troops. Who **knew** what they were about. **Knew** where they were gaeing. A lot o' times during the strike the miners **didnae know** where they were gaeing. **Didnae know** what they were targetting for. In fact, when we were having discussions here about where we were gaeing there was this unclarity about what we should be daeing at certain times. "Why should we be picketing there?" "Should we be attempting tae dae **this**?" There was a lack o' an overall strategy about what we were attempting tae dae.



Thus, despite the thoroughness of local organisation, the Fife miners saw the government and NCB as possessing a strategy, whilst their Union was often directionless and outmanoeuvred. It was this disjuncture between local activity and the national level of the decision-making in the strike which was to carry important ramifications for the Party, as we shall see later. The tactical failure by the Union was to become crucially highlighted three months into the strike when, on 18th June 1984, some 10,000 pickets assembled at the Orgreave coking plant[2]. It is this date which is most commonly identified as being the occasion when doubts about tactics became clarified into certainty. A 24 year old unaligned miner recalls the significance of Orgreave:-

It was just aifter summer when it became clear that picketing wasnae gaeing tae win the strike. The days at Orgreave were a show o' strength, ye see. Because we had, prior tae that, in April, May and that, tried tae get doon tae England and they wouldnae let us in. They were stopping us at the border and sending us back. When we went tae Orgreave they let everybody in, and that was the furst time they'd ever done that. They let **everybody** in. And that was us, a show o' strength, ye see. And we had all the members there, and they had all the polis there, and we couldnae stop them, ye see. And ah think it was orchestrated. Ah'm sure it was, ken. Ah'm sure they wanted a showdoon on the picketing issue. And if ye look back fra' there, then the big picketing **did** stop. The picketing in Scotland and that took a lesser tone than it had. And ah reckon that happened aye o'er. In Wales and that. It was **realised** that wi' picketing we couldnae stop them. We had tae broaden oor ootlook o' hoo we were gaeing tae get a settlement ootae this strike b' means that we had never employed before. And ah think within the Executive o' the Union and that ye heard mair aboot trying tae win the appeal o' the people. Trying tae win public opinion and that, o' trying tae get **greater** support fra' other unions tae put pressure on the Coal Board. Ye ken, the transport and the dockers and that. And that's when it staired tae become, "We'll have tae gae tae the TUC."

From summer onwards, therefore, among certain sections of the miners, at least, it became increasingly clear that the Union needed to reappraise systematically its strategy of mass picketing and, instead, emphasise the necessity of building broad-based campaigns geared to improving public sympathy. Much of this criticism came from within the CP, both within and outwith Fife. Mick McGahey, for example, was expressing these concerns from the



summer onwards[3]. There was a growing realisation that not only was mass-picketing not giving the desired results, it was giving positively **undesireable** results. At the same time, miners in Fife were becoming convinced of the government's determination to defeat the strike at all costs and so, consequently, that the strike was lost. Orgreave was, therefore, in many senses both the catalyst and the turning point. The communist father of the above young miner argues:-

The lads came back fra' Orgreave [knowing] that they werenae gaeing tae win. Because they had put all o' their resources, all o' their forces intae one place at one time. They had gone tae various pickets like Ravenscraig and Hunterston, and whenever they turned-up there was ayeways mair polis than them. And they were **ayeways** looking fur a victory, and they were **ayeways** being defeated. And they went tae Orgreave, and Arthur summoned his "army", his "Spartacus army o' peasants"! Fra' all over Britain. And the police had set it up. Orgreave was created **specifically** tae defeat them.... An ambush. **Created**. They picked the time and the place tae inflict the defeat.... [So] the lads came back fra' Orgreave **knowing**. They had gone there in high spirits, wi' buses fra' all o'er Britain. The Sco'ish miners, the Welsh miners and all the rest o' it. And it was Scargill's "Saltley Gates".

Thus Orgreave was perceived by many to be Scargill's 'Last Stand'. For many, it was from the juncture of this defeat that the perception grew of the totality of the opposing forces. The naivety of the early months was over. A 33 year old Labour Party member characterises the opinion:-

Well, the lessons ah learnt fra' it was the Tory government'll nae stop at nae expense tae beat a strike. Ah mean, they'll ruin the country afore they'll let onybody beat them in a strike. And, at the time, if the strike went on another two years, they would ha' borrowed, spent. They would ha' done **onething**.

This point marks the transition of the strike onto a more overtly defensive level. Whilst the strike was, by its nature, defensive in the sense of being to protect jobs and communities, while there had been a faith in possible victory there had also been an assertive side to the strike. From Autumn onwards, however, among those who perceived that they were outmatched this attitude increasingly declined. Consequently, although many non-radicals



expressed the opinion they they believed that the strike could be won until near the end, it is among radicals and union activists that this earlier belief dies quickest. In such circumstances motivation must become harder to sustain. For radicals with a politicised world view, therefore, activism was largely possible because they saw the continuation of the strike in terms of the defence of only that which it was possible to save from the confrontation - the Union. The progression of the strike, and the assumptions that underlay the motivation of radicals throughout this, are aptly summed up by a 27 year old communist:-

We went intae that strike, and ah'll be honest, at the stairt o' the strike ah thought it was winnable, ah'll be quite honest. And ah dinnae think that we fully understood hoo much the Tories had prepared fur that strike. They had been preparing fur that strike fur a lang time and had probably pushed us intae that strike. And we went blindly in. At the same time ah dinnae think we had a choice. Ah think we had tae strike at that time. But, tae me onyway, it quickly became appairant that the fight was lost, and that the Tories were actually oot, tae me, at the end, the Tories were oot tae destroy the Union. It moved away fra' a fight aboot pits, that was ma opinion and ah had alot o' discussions wi' the branch aboot that, but they were oot tae destroy oor Union and were obviously prepared fur it. The miners werenae prepared. We went in blindly wi' the same ald slogans thinking we could dae it again, and we were aboot ten years ootae time. Crazy.... Tae me, ah raised cer'ain objections during the strike, ah'm talking aboot fra' November on, that we knew that the fight was lost, the fight was away, and that the important thing at that stage was the uni'y o' the Union, and making sure that the Union went back together. That was the reason ah kept oot on strike. It was a dangerous si'uation, ah'll be quite honest.... Scargill came oot wi' a statement that he was prepared tae stay oot another year. Ah think the men, almost up till the end, thought they could win. But ah don't think they saw the same danger tae the Union that maybe people that were involved politically saw: that it was an attack on the Union itsel.

This statement implies that those whose political beliefs gave them a framework within which to analyse the ramifications of the strike, thus had a clearer insight into possible eventualities. Yet at the same time those beliefs also provided them with the means to perceive the necessities for action, which provided motivation. However, even this awareness was not, on its own, capable of sustaining morale. The next quotation, from a



communist, shows how, in the last analysis, it was blind hope and loyalty that kept them going:-

They lived in hope. One day the news would be guid, and ye'd be up. The next day the news would be bad, and ye'd be doon. And ye were like that through-oot the strike. Ye know, when NACODS come oot it looked as though [there'd be a breakthrough]. So ye lived in hope while yur be'er senses were telling ye, "Ach, it's away. We've lost." But ye lived in hope. Ye were clinging tae hope. Ye were clinging tae loyalty. Loyalty tae the Union. Loyalty tae yur fellows. But within ye, [ye knew].

#### 9.5 The Finish.

Fur about the last two months o' the strike it was impossible tae get onybody tae talk about the strike in the Strike Centre. Naebody wanted tae talk about it. Didnae want tae analyse what was happening. They were just gaeing through the motions. They didnae want tae think about what was inevitable. They knew the strike was lost. They had known that since before Christmas. Nae langer wanted tae talk about, tae analyse what was gaeing tae happen. Just waiting. We were si'ing in the Strike Centre when the announcement came over, and it was the two things. The sense o' relief, most people were relieved it was over. Ah mean, they heaved a sigh o' relief, and ah dinnae think onybody said anything aifter that. They just wondered when and hoo they'd gae back.

#### 9.6 The Return to Work.

There were both negative and positive sentiments to be found among the men as they returned to work in March 1985. Although many had long accepted defeat, there was despair to have struggled so long without a solution at national level, resentment at the admittedly small number of scabs, and guilt about the 'boys at the gate'; the victimised men. For all of the sample there were feelings of bitterness and resentment. Especially among the non-radical element of the sample, however, demoralisation was a crucial characteristic. One unaligned man in his 40s describes the return to work:-

Ah was crying that night when ah went in on the night shift. When that bus went intae the pit-gate, ken, the whole bus and there wasnae a ward said. No' fra' one man tae another, ye ken. Usually they're all cracking away, ye ken. And e'body



just had a lump in their throat, ye ken. We went back defeated, ye ken.

Knowing that they were defeated, resentment turned against those whose actions were held to be, at least partially, responsible for that defeat. Although accepting that they were beaten by superior forces, blame could be placed upon those who, by being part of the collectivity, were seen to have betrayed that position. Thus, whilst relieved to be back at work, this was tainted with anger. A 26 year old unaligned man argues:-

Ah was glad tae be back at wark when we did get back, ye know, and everybody was happy tae be back. Ye'd come up fur yur wark happy, and then ye'd gae up tae the men, and there'd be five men stonding at the front o' this group o' men, and five men stonding at the back o' they group o' men, all walking towards ye. They were all scabs, ye see. They kept them all in one place, ye know. And it was walking past they men, then the anger, ye'd feel the anger inside ye again. Ye were happy tae be back tae wark but ye kent ye were beat. And that was the kindae thing that was beating ye. People gaeing back tae wark. Her spending all that money burning oil, ye know. [Ah felt] cheated and degraded by ma ain warkforce, no' fra' high-up. There was a resentful feeling. There were vast reasons and things, but ah think that's what stuck-oot most. People no' stonding by each other. Because we did so much **through** the strike. We fought so much **through** the strike. And we put so much **intae** the strike. And they took everything away b' daeing things like that, ye know. Scabbing.

For some miners, the atmosphere in the pits after the strike was such that they no longer felt they could continue. The bitterness and resentment tarnished the pit. For older men, able to take advantage of redundancy offers to cut the workforce, the option was to leave. One 49 year old Labour Party member who took redundancy explains:-

Ah only warked two days in the pit, and it was two days tae much. Och, ah couldnae wark wi' what was left. Just scab miners, ye know. Them that broke the strike. And we no'iced right away that the management, it was a different a'itude wi' them, ken.... There was nae negotiating. They were gaeing tae kick the ball. And ah couldnae wark there because, tae be quite honest wi' ye, ah warked that monday night shift and there was a scab miner taunting me in the lamp-cabin, on the surface before we went doon the pit that night. This one who was the leading scab in this area. He says, "There's an awfy smell in here." But he was **deliberately** taunting me because



he kent that he had the protection o' the management, and he was trying tae get me secked. And ah was gaeing tae smash his lamp back intae his face, ye ken, ah was! But then ah kent what was happening. And there was another scab miner threatened me doon the pit. And ah came hame, and ah went tae ma bed and... ah just tellt ma wife ah wasnae gaeing back, ken. And that was it.

These statements are interesting because, as we saw at the beginning of the chapter, there were not, in fact, many scabs in Fife, yet they are regarded with a great amount of hostility even though not a significant threat in the county. What appears to be the case is that the sight of the scabs in the pits gave physical presence to the causes for defeat; that is, that they embodied the whole range of reasons which beat the strike. They symbolised, in available form, the enemy: all those opposed to the collectivity. Further, and evidence confirms that there are many incidents of this, scabs were seen to flaunt management protection and the miners' defeat in the faces of the strikers. Beaten and bitter, this acted to inflame striking miners. Yet the bad feeling underground working with men who were not part of the collectivity was enhanced by sadness about those who had stood firm, but had been victimised by the NCB. One young communist states:-

Ye felt bad because there were guys left stonking at the gate, and their families. Ah felt really bad aboot that because victimised men werenae ge'ing back in the gate. Well, when ah say bad, ah really mean bad, ye ken. On a scale fra' 1 tae 10, it's number 10!

An unaligned Union official explains how the failure to win reinstatement for the sacked miners was part of the overall defeat:-

We ayeways said we wouldnae leave boys at the gate, and we did. That was, talking aboot defeat, that's the only thing ah would say we were defeated on. That was the only sad thing aboot it, ye ken.

This sadness is, in some senses, a feeling of guilt felt about the sacked men in that it could have happened to any of them: sacking is seen as an arbitrary phenomenon during the strike. The sense of injustice in the way in which men were charged for activities



not regarded as criminal in 'normal' circumstances, thus enhances the feeling of responsibility felt in the aftermath to victimised miners. These factors were enforced by the hardening of attitudes towards the external forces which brought about the defeat; most particularly the NCB and Tory government. For the majority of the sample, it is this latter to which is felt most frustration and anger, for it is seen as having been behind, and encouraging, the NCB's intransigence. A quotation from a Labour Party member in his 30s shows the hostility towards the Conservative government, and Thatcher in particular:-

Ah honestly think before the miners' strike that the trade unions didnae realise, or didnae think, that the government would gae tae the extent it did tae beat the miners. Ah dinnae think they realised, ken. Ah think they sortae thought that it was just another Tory government like MacMillan, or Heath, ken. "Ach, the miners'll be oot eight weeks and, ken, there'll be a settlement." And ah dinnae think they realise she's a fucking fascist. She's no' interested in the warking class. She's no' interested in us **whatsoever**, and she'll dae **anything** tae beat us. Ah'll tell ye noo, if she got beat in an election she'd have the pigging soldiers on the streets, man. She's no' real. She's no' right. Och, ah cannae fucking explain it. Somebody'll have tae put a gun tae her and put a bullet through her.

Much of this antagonism is based upon a sense of unfairness firstly, that their case was not recognised and, secondly, at the treatment with which they were met, and in which the government is seen as having heavily colluded. The strike was a stark lesson in politics. Yet attitudes towards the strike, and the lessons that were learned, differ among different sections of the sample; that is, among non-radicals and those previously radical. As such, we must distinguish between their attitudes.

### 9.7 Staying the Course.

It is in relation to the experience of the course of the strike that one can see stark differences between the radical and non-radical elements within the sample. For all involved, the year was a hard, but educational experience. Families, used to a regular income, had to rely on financial assistance which, though



forthcoming, was not secure and less than that to which they were accustomed, and expertise had to be acquired about methods of organisation. But perhaps most importantly, insights were gained into the nature of societal power structures which, in many cases, had not been seen before. For those non-radicals who did not come to an overt political stance during the strike politicisation, though obviously greater than that for those already politicised, was largely at an implicit level; that is, they perceived what happened to them, yet this is not located within a systematised political framework. The growing awareness of social arrangements can be found among all unaligned men and certain Labour Party members. It is among such men one can find awareness without a political world view which would enable greater understanding. Clearly this is hard to demonstrate, but can be indicated by the following comment by an unaligned man asked how the strike affected him:-

... we proved we could live fur a year withoot wages and that, and we still managed tae live. We managed tae feed oorsel and ha' a li'le bit o' a social life. We didnae ha' ony holidays, o' course, we lost oot on that. But we had a fairly guid Christmas and New Year and that, because we were looked aifter by the social services and the communi'y and that.

Whilst this clearly refers to the strike in mundane terms, this does not mean that unaligned men lack a critical awareness of the strike. The following quotation, from a Labour Party member in his late 40s, combines the mundane with a sense of oppositional consciousness:-

There was nae money, yur whole life was changed. Relationships wi' the polis became bi'er. Ah had a case o' ma 14 year ald loddie, two constables had been at the door when ah was over at the Strike Centre, charging him fur breach o' the peace fur shouting the ward "scab". And ah found oot that this is the full majesty o' the law in Britain, and ye're talking aboot 1984. And it made me think and, ye ken, it was just an awfy time. There was some happy times, ah suppose at the stairt. We were aye kindae game, it was nice weather, and that was the guid thing that could be said aboot it.... And ah feel verra bi'er towards the trade-union movement and the Labour Party, and Neil Kinnock in particular, ken. They all stood back and let it happen tae us, ken. And they all got up in front o' the media and the television news and documentary programmes and, "Yes, we will support the miners." And



Willis, when he got sworn in as General Secretary o' the TUC, "Yes, we will support ye." All the delegates coming-up fra' the big unions. They just stood back and let it all happen.

This quotation shows both an oppositional awareness of the forces arraigned against the miners, and bitterness at the failure of key sections of the labour movement to fully mobilise behind this. It is among the unaligned that one can find the greatest bitterness towards the rest of the labour movement, which is seen as betraying the miners by not coming out fully in their support[4]. Although some of the more politically-aware communists and socialists realise that the TUC was let down by the rank-and-file, for many unaligned men this was inexcusable. The betrayal lies in the failure to support collectivistic values. One unaligned young miner argues:-

There was a general bi'erness among the men due tae the TUC, where we saw the fact that they werenae coming forrad wi' the guids and support fur the men. We thought that they had sellt us oot. We were looking fur support fra' the TUC.

Although all unaligned, and a minority of Labour Party, miners interviewed showed this bitterness at the TUC, the greatest sense of injustice and hostility is felt towards the judiciary, media and government. Again this is often more vehemently expressed than among radicals. Two quotations, both from unaligned men in their 40s, show us how this hostility, in this instance against the police, may be due to a greater sense of powerlessness felt during the strike:-

Ah was a helluva bi'er at the tactics the polis used, ken. They way they tried tae break-up pickets and all the rest o' it. Ah mean, wi' their big horses, and their shields and their batons, and we're running aboot wi' a pair o' jeans and a pair o' baffies on oor feet, ye ken. And we werenae there fur [violence], ken. They were the aggressors. There's nae mistake aboot that, ken. Ah mean, we were at the Frances pit there, and they were at the back o' the line, and the scabs were coming in in their monkey-cages, as ah cried them, ye ken. Their buses. And the polis there were back-heeling us and kicking us in the shins and all, ye ken. Fur nothing at all, ye ken. Just fur tae stir us up.



If we'd ha' had guns we'd ha' shot them. If we'd ha' guns we'd ha' shot the polis. The abuse the boys took on the picket lines. They were ge'ing beat-up fur nothing.

This is coupled with a sense of powerlessness in the face of what is seen as the media's bias in reporting the strike, so that miners felt their case was not being heard[5]. An unaligned man in his 20s argues:-

Ah seen the state machine in action. Ah seen what they were daeing tae us, ken. Ah would gae tae mee'ings and listen tae Scargill saying something and it would say something to'ally different on the telly at night. Ken, they would be telling ye that there were 50 people warking in the paper and that. And ah'd stond there everyday and see naebody gae up tae their wark, or two folk and that.

The greatest hostility, however, as was mentioned earlier, is towards the Conservative government. Again, we see feelings of powerlessness and a sense of injustice, but tied to this is a certain incomprehension as to the reasons for the treatment with which they were met. These attitudes can be seen from two quotations from unaligned men, one in his late 20s and the other in his 40s:-

Well, at that time we didnae know she was selling hospitals and things like this tae keep the strike gaeing. She was burning oil all around the clock, ye know, things like that.

Well, the present-day Tories, mind ye, they had that strike and everything planned fur alot o' years, ye ken. They done it deliberately. And ah dinnae think ah'll ever forgive the Tories fur daeing a thing like that. Tae hammer people intae the groond the way they did.... Ah'll never forgive them fur that. Because they broke-up, ah would say, alot o' marriages, they broke-up alot o' friendships. They done everything and they didnae care. They didnae care fur the people.

We can see from these statements that two interrelated factors seem of importance in understanding how non-radical miners responded to the strike. The first factor is that whilst we can see an oppositional consciousness, an awareness of the political nature of social arrangements and the forces they confronted, this is not located within a systematised political framework which would enable them to give a coherent analysis of their position. Connected to this is the feeling of powerlessness; for it is



perhaps due to this lack of a political world view that they fail to fully explain the nature of the attack, nor the means to deal with it. They thus lack an explicit political understanding and a conceptualisation of the dialectic of control. There is not the sense of knowledgeability and capability that we find among radicals.

These quotations therefore help us gain an understanding of the argument between Lockwood [1975] and Westergaard [1975] discussed in Chapter One about the relationship between social imagery and class consciousness. It will be remembered that the debate focused around whether social imagery contained an implicitly political element and the relationship between imagery and class consciousness. The above statements appear to accord with Westergaard's argument that social imagery is implicitly political. Certainly the above statements do display an implicitly oppositional political awareness, yet these men fail to locate their observations and experiences within a coherent world view that enables them to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the unfolding of events. It is an unsystematised perception of conflict. Thus, the differences between the two types of respondent should not be over-stressed. The perception, as we have seen and shall examine more closely later, is similar, but merely expressed differently according to the degree of political articulation. Further, in many ways, the experiences of the strike led to a greater convergence between the beliefs of the men.

For all respondents the strike was an educational process either on practical or political levels or, for some, on both. As we have seen, the miners see themselves as having started the strike in naive optimism, yet they ended with a bitter aware of the forces arraigned against them. For all the unaligned men, therefore, the year was a radicalising experience, as they acknowledge, and although not all those interviewed have since joined a political party, all attest to a growing political awareness. For some this has led to a more overt new activism.



either in the Union or politically. Yet, on certain levels, all the men shared certain experiences and perceptual developments, and it is to these that we must turn before examining the particular response of the radicals. For the strike provided all of the sample who participated with a coherent sense of identity which exists in the present, rather than existing merely as a legacy from the past. The historical legacy has thus gained a new chapter.

#### 9.8 The Legacy of 1984-85..

Clearly a year such as 1984-85 was one wherein the striking miners had to confront situations previously unknown. None of the sample who were on strike were old enough to remember the last prolonged national dispute of 1926, whilst of the 15 who had been part of the strikes of the 1970s only 5 were in the local leadership. Thus, the 31 miners who participated in 1984-85 were largely without first-hand experience of organisation. In such circumstances the strike meant that new skills had to be developed. For all those in the strike, whatever their level of involvement, it resulted in greater sense of personal strength and confidence. They were tested, and in so being, had to discover personal resources and expertise which many had not previously known they possessed. One young communist talks of developing new talents:-

... ah realised alot o' things masel that ah could dae that, perhaps, before the strike ah just didnae think ah was capable o' daeing. Well, ah went tae speak at public mee'ings, which ah had verra li'le experience o' before the strike. And ah could organise other people, which ah think is a tremendous ability fur onybody, tae be able tae sit doon and organise other people intae action. It's easy enough tae get aff yur ain backside and gae and dae something, but tae organise other people and tae cairry them forrad is something else.

Practical knowledge, and the daily experience of the strike also gave greater political insights to those involved, especially to young or politically-unaligned miners who either had not witnessed major conflict, or been politically active. The effect for such



miners, gaining first hand knowledge of the state, judiciary and media, was to profoundly alter social perceptions; that is, the strike radicalised all those elements of the sample not previously aligned. One 72 year old communist describes the effects he has witnessed on the younger generation:-

Ah think, in many respects, they are mair politicised [than they used tae be]. For example, if ye take before the strike, if ah had been talking tae warkers in a pub or onywhere else, and trying tae explain tae them that the state was no' neutral, the state was an instrument o' whatever current socie'y that exists, they create a state tae perpetuate their ain image, their ain interests, ah wouldae had a great deal o' difficulty in explaining that. And ah had a great deal o' difficulty explaining that, ge'ing people tae accept that. Ye ha' nae trouble convincing a miner aboot that noo. Because they've seen the way the judiciary and the polis were used against them in that strike. They understond much mair clearly than their forefeythers did that the state is no' neutral. They understond that crystal clear because they've got the bluid tae show it. They've got the marks tae show it.

This general realisation of social arrangements derived from the strike encouraged many young men who had not previously been politically active to take a more forceful role in the Union or political parties. One such previously inactive young miner in his early 20s explains how the strike changed his outlooks:-

Ye see, ah used tae have alot o' ambition before the strike. Ah wasnae intae the Union or that. Ah went tae college and got a Higher National in engineering. And all ah thought aboot then was that ah wanted tae get away fra' [the industry]. Ah wasnae wanting tae wark wi' ma bonds. Ah wasnae wanting tae wark in an industry such as that. Ah didnae want tae be associated wi' it. But noo, it's changed, see. The strike changed me alot, ye see. Ah seen such things, ken. Values that ah had, ken, fur material things and that. Ah was wanting cars and bikes and valuing things raither than people. And ah was reading the tory press who were telling me that everything was a' right. And all these sneers aboot Scargill and that. And ah couldnae see what they were daeing tae people, ken. And when ah came oot on strike it was me that was there. Ye know, it wasnae British Leyland or the dockers or that, it was me that was in that position. Ah mean, ye get back tae yursel. And it makes ye realise [what ah'd thought before is] no' what it's aboot. And ah says, "Well, maybe there's something worth fighting fur here."



He continues to explain how the strike brought about a change in himself, and his self-opinion:-

Ye see, ah was ayeways a person who could be bought, as 95% o' people can. If somebody says tae me, "Every person's got their price," ah used tae argue that they did. But naebody would ha' made me gae back tae ma wark. No' because onybody would ha' banged me or onything, or hammered me or that, but ah wouldnae ha' broke the solidarity ah had wi' ma friends, who ah respect. Because, ye see, people would say tae ye, "Ach, everybody's got their price," ken. And that's what happened. Ye stairt developing that thing where yes gae through something as haird as that together, and ye see the whole state, and the telly and the papers is against ye all the time, and all yes got is each other. And ye realise all the things that the state represents, ye see that. Ye see, ah said tae ma dad one night aboot it changing hoo ah saw masel. Ah've lived 24 years, ye see, and ah've never really done onything, ye ken. Nothing really worth while, ken. But ah think ah've done something there worthwhile. Ah mean, ah havenae contributed onything tae socie'y. Ah dinnae sit on Councils, Communi'y Council. Ah dinnae help the ald folk or onything. Ah dinnae dae onything, ken, really. But ah felt as though ah'd done something then which made me feel be'er within masel, ken. Because it's possible tae have everything, as far as material things gae, ken, and have nothing, ye see. Ye've got tae have satisfaction within yursel. Ah could never ha' went back tae ma wark during that strike, ken, aifter a month. Because when ah furst stairted ah was wanting back, ken. Ah went, "Ach, naw. Ah'm no' handling this," like, ken. "Miners' Union," and that. But ah developed a respect fur the Union, ye see, who sustained us.

This quotation shows us two things. Firstly, it demonstrates how the strike acted to define clearly the occupational community in opposition to other forces; thereby reinforcing the mechanisms involved in the development of communal identity. Secondly, it shows how the objective circumstances of the strike acted to radicalise younger miners. Yet politicisation in the present also served to establish the credibility of the present generation in relation to the past; that is, it served to legitimise their position in the historical legacy of the Fife miners. The experiences of 1984-85 have given younger miners, through their hardships, an enhanced sense of self-esteem in relation to the struggles of previous generations. A 33 year old communist expresses this sentiment, and at the same time, indicates how a



knowledge of the past may have acted to instill a determination to live up to past standards:-

The '84-85 strike changed ma life dramatically. Changed ma outlook tae ma life dramatically. Tae me, ah suppose the '84-85 strike, in a nutshell, means this. Ah've ayeways been interested in the history o' this area, and the history o' the mines. And ah like nothing be'er than tae sit in the company o' yur ald miners and listen tae their tales o' the pit and the '26 strike. And ah used tae sit in awe at some o' these alder men. Their tales o' their hairdships and what they'd done in '26. Ah can noo look at they men right in the eye, as an equal, because o' the '84-85 strike. Ah mean, ah'm no' saying oor time is ony easier or hairder than they'n, but ah'm an equal, and that means alot tae me, ye know, as an individual. Ah dinnae look up tae them noo, ah dinnae look doon on them, ah'm an equal. That means alot. [The strike] was a bit ah didnae want tae dae. Ah mean, let's face it, who the hell wants tae gae on strike fur a year? In fact, who maybe wants tae gae on strike at all? But ah'm proud, and ah gained three things fra' the strike that'll last me fur the rest o' ma life, and that's pride, dignity and self-respect. And, ah mean, they things cannae be bought. Ah'm proud in the sense that ah stood up fur ma job, ma communi'y and ma femily. Ah've got dignity in the fact that ah stood firm, and ah've got self-respect in that ah can look onybody in the eye. Ah can look [the ald boys] in the eye as equals, and that means alot. Ah'm proud in the fact ah stood firm. Ah was oot on strike fur so lang. Ah suffered so much. It was haird at the time.

It is in this way that one can argue that through the strike the younger generation have become part of the particularistic historical legacy of the Fife miners, by living through a period characterised by conflict and solidarity. The present has thus legitimised the sense of the past by the continuing relevance of the values of the past, which the younger generation have become part of by living up to those values. Yet in addition to revitalising the oppositional sense of history, a new legacy has been created; that is, that despite the defeat, 1984-85 has enriched the cultural repertoire for the future, by both adding onto the significant history and extending the 'message' of this through continued applicability. This sense of the dynamic can be seen from the following statement from the same miner:-

There's a cer'ain pride and dignity in the folk that took pairt in '84-85. Ye'll get alot o' them at the pits, ye know, "We should forget it. We got beat," ye ken. And miners are



a funny breed, they tend tae be, hoo can ah put it, ah'll no' say chauv..., aye, they're chauvinistic in a cer'ain way. And if ye talk tae them aboot pride and dignity they tend tae shy aff, ye know. They're cissy wards. They're no' intae that, ye know. But at the same time, when ye sit and talk tae them, even the ones that say, "Ach, we should forget aboot the strike," ye get them talking and, "Ach, ah remember the picket-lines at Bilston Glen." And, "Ach, ah remember this," and "Ah remember that." And ye can see it in their eyes, ken. They were proud, proud o' what they done. Alot o' them dinnae understond the historical implications o' the strike. Ah mean, it was the same in 1926. It wasnae until many years aifter when ye can look at it in the context o' what was happening at that time, ye know, tae fully understond the effect o' the strike. And it's when ye can look at it in hindsight, maybe 5, 10, 15 years time fra' noo, when ye can look at the '84-85 strike, and the impact it had on socie'y in Britain. And alot o' them dinnae appreciate that, ye ken. But ah reckon, when alot o' them grow up they'll be si'ing there wi' their wee grandbairns on their knees, and they'll be, "Ah remember in '84-85..." ye ken what ah mean. And there'll be pride, and there'll be dignity there, and ye can feel it. They might no' talk about it, but ye can feel it, ye ken.

1984-85, therefore, provides a dual legitimation; of the history of the miners as essentially one of conflict and hardship, and of the place of the younger generation within that history. It was these experiences which made the strike a radicalising phenomenon in that, due to its oppositional nature it was inherently political. It dealt with 'us-and-them', and how 'we' can succeed or fail in our dealings with 'them'. Yet this politicisation was in no way inevitable but must be seen within the particular spatio-temporal circumstances of the county.

The circumstances of the strike required an education in the prerequisites of strike activity, and for this reason knowledge had to be sought from those who had such an experience. This served to educate younger miners in two senses; firstly, in an organisational sense, but secondly, in learning to deal with present actualities they also learnt of the past. As we have seen, the history of the Fife miners has been one dominated by opposition and radical left-wing politics. Consequently, it was a significant history which they learnt from. It socialised them in a way which was crucially determined by the past experiences of



those who socialised them. The Fife miners thus learnt of their past as they learnt of the necessities of their present; both past and present becoming combined within understandings required by, and created within the strike.

Yet not all miners were radicalised by the strike, nor, in a sense, gained a greater sense of collective identity. For radicals, political attitudes did not undergo profound changes, and their sense of location within the legacy meant that identification was already strong. Rather, what was gained was a welding together of political theory and social practice in a way which serves to reinforce the former. Further, whilst demoralisation existed within all miners in the sample, it was among the politically-articulate that morale and the determination to continue to fight for the industry in the wake of defeat could be found most prominently.

#### 9.9 Praxis.

For those who adhered to systematically-formulated political world views they were able to use these as a framework within which to analyse and make sense of the events of the strike. Yet the practical experience of the strike also acted back to augment or provide a fuller understanding of the beliefs held. For younger radicals, required to deal with organisation and tactics during the strike, this meant they had to confront situations during the course of the year which many of the older miners had come to more gradually over time. In this sense, they gained much more rapidly a practical backing to augment political beliefs. One communist in his late 40s, who had joined the Party in 1958 at 21 years of age in defence of the communist leadership under attack from right-wing elements in the Union, argues:-

Ye see, during the miners' strike ah was making a joke aboot it. Ah says, "Christ, there was me [in the '50s] reading that book fur six month, describing hoo the role o' the state is in relation tae suppressing warkers engaging in activities, or engaging in battles, and the furst couple o' weeks intae the strike oor loddies were learning in practical terms the role o' the state. The heavy political stuff.



The practicalities of the strike thereby served to locate political ideas within objective circumstances due to necessity. The experiences of the strike served to confirm or modify what had previously been purely theoretical knowledge. One young communist recalls:-

It changed ma ideas aboot alot o' things. It changed ma ideas aboot the role o' the state and all that. All ma political knowledge that ah knew before was mainly academic, if ye want tae use that ward, ye ken. It was just things ah'd picked-up here and there. But ah actually saw it taking place, ye ken.

Yet if actuality reinforced ideology, at the same time, political orientations allowed radicals to approach the organisation of the strike with a systematised framework of understanding which could facilitate organisational necessities; that is, it enabled radicals to keep a firmer understanding of the direction and meaning of their activities. The same young man continues:-

Well, the day-tae-day wark during the strike learnt ye, furst o' all, tae keep a cool heid. Because people came tae ye wi' money demands all the time. "Ma gas has been cut aff. Ma gas has been cut aff." So ye had tae keep a cool heid and ye had tae think all the time. Ye had tae think on yur feet. The minute ye stepped intae that Strike Centre people would be in, and they'd need yur help. It wasnae because they were wanting tae badger ye, or they were wanting tae ask something that wasnae reasonable, they just needed yur help. And if ye were there ye had tae provide it. The lessons tae was that even amongst all that sortae day-tae-day turmoil ye had tae ha' a clear vision o' where ye were gaeing, and if ye lost that vision, ye were in deep trouble.

Theory and practice thereby reinforced each other during the course of the strike. Neither dominant, but interacting with each other. Yet whilst each level might, of necessity, be modified by the experiences of the year, those with articulate political beliefs did not significantly alter their perceptions or theoretical understandings. One quotation from a 55 year old communist demonstrates the point:-

It didnae change ma views. It changed ma views aboot a number o' individual people fur the guid, because ah saw things developing in people ah didnae think they were capable o'. It



raised alot' o' people in ma esteem, who ah'd somehow looked upon as no' being much cop. It reinforced what ah'd ayeways felt politically. Reinforced all the things ah'd been fed on since ah was a boy. The role o' the state, the role o' the police, the role o' the media. Hoo people responded. What it was all aboot. It reinforced everything that ah had ayeways believed in. That's what it did tae me.

In addition to providing a framework within which to analyse and deal with the strike, political beliefs also enabled adherents to come to terms with defeat in a more positive way than for other members of the sample. Whilst radicals also acknowledge that the strike was lost, and were disappointed by the outcome, the demoralisation in which this awareness resulted was not as profound as with non-radicals. Rather than viewing the defeat as an irredeemable phenomenon, it is seen as an undoubted setback, but there is the belief in the ability to recover lost ground if a new approach is adopted to industrial and political action. Thus, in the wake of the strike, radical political beliefs provided the source for the faith to continue. Compare the following statement from a 51 year old communist to those of unaligned miners quoted earlier:-

Ah was disappointed [at the end]. Och, there's nae doubt aboot it, ah was disappointed. But ah think ah had the politics sortae tae overcome that, ye know. Ah had the politics. But obviously ah was disappointed. Ah mean, ah can only pick that ward, it was disappointing. But the struggle daesnae end there. Ah mean, because at the end o' the strike, the miners lost the strike, but the struggle gaes on. The struggle gaes on.

If the beliefs of radicals inured them against the totality of defeat through a perception of the future, as we shall see more clearly later, it also provided the analytical tools with which to comprehend the strike. As we have seen, the political insights of the communists engendered a clearer awareness of the tactical failures of the year's dispute, which were summed-up in motions to reorientate the direction of action towards broad-based campaigns at the 39th Congress. Yet if their understandings of the potential development of the strike, grounded within an adherence to Marxist theory, allowed them to make structural



assessments, this merely serves to emphasise both their failure to take their case convincingly to the miners, and also their strategic weakness to effect the main course of the strike which was grounded elsewhere; whether this was at NUM headquarters in Sheffield or within parliament. A 27 year old communist points to the first of these failings:-

There was nae real discussion that ah'm aware o' wi' the majori'y o' miners that explained the si'uation or hoo we saw the si'uation developing, and it became a sortae ritual just picketing, ken, picketing, picketing. That was it. And ah dinnae think the miners understood what was gaeing on.

Therefore, despite their active role in organising the response to the strike within Fife, especially in Central Fife, and their ability to make a coherent analysis, in many ways the CP failed to win over the majority of miners in a way which could capitalise on the potential recruits. At a time when the rundown of the industry threatened their base within the county, and thus the future of the Party locally, such a failure was crucial. Party members accept that in many ways the Labour Party grasped the main initiative in expanding membership among the newly-politicised during the strike, although in the strikes of the 70s it was the CP that benefitted. One prominent CP member from Central Fife, who was a Union official at the time of the strike, argues:-

If ye take the '72 strike, what ah no'iced in '72, we were oot fur seven weeks, there was a change, fur example, in the type o' slogans the lads were shouting. Sometimes they were shouting, "We want mair wages," and things like that. But, see, as the strike progressed, the last couple o' weeks prior tae the strike finishing, the boys were stairting tae shout tae get rid o' Heath. So they were becoming politicised by what we were saying tae them, what the mee'ings were saying. So that had an effect. Ye could see the men becoming politicised quite [clearly] fra' the type o' slogans they were shouting, tae the si'uation where they wanted rid o' the government. Because they realised that a Labour government was the most important thing. In '74 there was verra li'le tae dae aroond here because **nothing moved**. In '74 ah was involved in the General Election, because if ye remember Heath called a General Election in the middle o' the strike. Most o' the boys were coming intae the Labour Party [HQ] because there was nothing else tae dae. Ah mean, we didnae need tae picket the place. The pits were solid as far as that was concerned. So they were politicised in the sense that fra'



'72 tae '74 the boys said, "We done it once, we can dae it again." And we were successful. In Fife, the Party played the main [role] in terms o' hoo they saw the strategy during the strike. They had Strike Commi'ees. We were the advisory, Party advisers. The strikes o' '72 and '74 ah would say did boost the membership locally, among miners especially. '84-85 didnae. It was a different kindae campaign. It was a mair hectic campaign in the sense that, well, we were wrang and we lost it, that's the furst thing and, secondly, the Labour Party made quite alot o' recruits there. Asking people tae join the Labour Party. In the last couple o' months o' the strike it was, tae them, a recruiting agency. They were jumping on the band wagon all the time. Quite alot o' them did alot o' guid wark, ah'm no' being anti-Labour when ah say it, but they took advantage o' a si'uation, and some o' them were talking in the fashion that, "Ye'll never get things sorted until there's the next Labour government, and the best guarantee o' that is tae join the Labour Party." And people joined the Labour Party. It's no' a bad thing tae recruit tae an organisation, ah'm no' opposed tae it. We shouldae done mair o' it in the sense that we shouldae asked mair people. Noo, because we're that deeply involved we don't get a chance tae sit doon wi' people and discuss the necessi'y o' the Communist Party. Ah think that was a weakness in oor campaign.

The communists, therefore, despite their work during the strike were unable to make major advances locally. The reasons for this would appear to be those which we have examined earlier. At a local level, a large part in this decline can be seen to be due to the decline of the industry. This has had three interrelated consequences. Firstly, this clearly meant that there were less miners in Fife, and thus fewer in the Party's traditional base, resulting in a decline of the collective group within which the Party could appeal on moral and political grounds. Secondly, industrial decline and modernisation had led to a social integration which would further weaken the collective value system and expose the miners to other political influences. Thirdly, these two factors meant an overall reduction of a 'natural' recruiting ground which had traditionally accepted communist leadership, which consequently meant that the Party should have, as the above quotation indicates, but had failed to put in more conscious effort into improving membership. Yet there is a fourth factor implied by the previous statement; namely, the appeal by the Labour Party to national solutions.



As we saw in the previous chapter, communist leadership had been grounded in the activities of good local leaders in the private and early nationalisation periods. However, the changing nature of the industry and the centralisation of NCB decision-making clearly would affect the potentiality for local negotiations. In circumstances wherein the local base of the Party was also being eroded by social change, this removal of decision-making to areas outwith the locality would undermine the legitimacy of the local communist leadership and lessen their effectivity. It would therefore appear that it was into this gap that the Labour Party could launch their arguments in the strike, by claiming the Labour Party alone, which as we have seen is regarded as a national party existing outwith the communities, was capable of resolving the miners' dispute. Consequently, the very factors which gave the CP strength and lessened the local appeal of the Labour Party in the past, have now been reversed; that is that the major location of political confrontation for the miners has been removed from the local to national level. In the context of the strike, the weakness of the CP within British political structures became a hindrance which could no longer be mitigated against by the activities of local miners' leaders. In such a situation, one must obviously ask what benefits Party membership can offer.

The major advantage of Party membership would appear to be, as we noted in Chapter Eight, the ability of those with a radical world view to locate understandings of their lives; which, in the context of the strike, enabled communists to sustain morale due to beliefs in social change in the future. Thus, it is the dynamism and vision of the future which gave communists their source of strength.

The strike is seen as a 'one-off' strike in many ways. The scale, length and intensity of the 1984-85 strike is viewed as unparalleled within British labour history. A young communist argues:-

Ah think it was a one-off situation in the sense that the sortae scale it reached was quite unique. The sortae heights



that it went tae. And it would be verra difficult fur another union, furst o' all, tae sustain its members o'er a period o' that kind, or tae keep a campaign gaeing. And it would be verra difficult fur the miners tae dae it, let alone onybody else.

From this statement we can see that there is a belief that the resultant defeat of the miners, was a defeat for the trade-union movement, an idea we saw in an earlier chapter. In this sense 1984-85 is seen as epitomising a long-held maxim; a defeat for the miners is a defeat for all. One communist makes an explicit comparison:-

Ah think there's a great understanding noo among the masses o' warkers that the defeat o' the miners was a defeat fur them, and they're all suffering the consequences o' it. In fact, the defeat has weakened other unions, because they've lost their faith in militancy.

The assumption within this is that the miners' defeat carries ramifications for the rest of the labour movement. Thus 1984-85 is perceived as potentially a unique strike, in that if other unions, and the miners, can learn from its mistakes, such a dispute will never be allowed to happen again. It has highlighted the need for a qualitatively different approach to industrial action. A redundant communist in his 50s argues:-

Ah think the '84-85 strike was probably the most significant strike cer'ainly in this century, and it has made a whole lot o' people think aboot hoo, in fact, we conduct struggle in the fu'ure. Hoo can ye win struggle? Can ye win struggle? Ah think it's brought aboot a whole new **thinking** aboot industrial actions and struggle. Ah don't think there's ever been a strike like it **before**. Ah don't know if there'll ever be a strike like it **again**.

It is up to the younger generation to discover and take forward the new approach. The above man's son, a newly-politicised Union official, argues:-

[It was] definitely, definitely a different type o' strike. Set against a different background and climate. **Definitely**. That set, ah would say, the mode fur industrial action fra' noo on. Union/management relationship, all that sortae thing. **Definitely**. Afore, the unions had relied on workers' power. But we're coming up against a **different** force, ye ken, than



what we've come-up against [before]. Different conditions. People will have tae adapt differently tae hoo we're gaeing tae win. We still dinnae know hoo we're gaeing tae win. But we ken one thing fur sure, we arenae gaeing tae win by sticking 5,000 pickets here and there, and trying tae stop coke warks and that, because that isnae gaeing tae wark. That isnae gaein tae win us the argument. So it's different tactics we're talking about all together. If everyone learns fra' that [strike], there'll no' be a strike like that again. A strike like that just [daesnae happen twice].

Despite the knowledge that the Union is broken and beaten, political errors made, and the communities exhausted and demoralised, there is still a conviction amongst radicals that the miners can provide this new lead, and the determination to do so. A young communist argues:-

Well, the role o' the miners in the labour movement noo is the same as what it's ayeways been. The miners, tae me, had a number o' important principles that were close tae their hairts. No' just the fraternity o' the industry but everything that went wi' that. Obviously, striving fur socialism, a ward that's sometimes looked doon on noo, and Thatcher's said she wants tae get rid o' it, so there's that principle o' socialism, that concept. There's also other things about internationalism wi' other people through-out the world. And all these sortae concepts that the labour movement had fur years were there because the people, no' just the miners, but mainly the miners, could inject they sortae things in the labour movement. And the Miners' Union could still dae that, because although we took a hammering over one year, that daesnae mean tae say the principles ye ayeways stood fur is wrang. And it's injecting that back intae the labour movement. We could still dae that.

For the radicals in the sample, this conviction of the possibility to continue in the future is based within their political beliefs about the potentiality for society, and the need to claim 'decent moral treatment' for the majority, whom they perceive as being denied intrinsic human rights. As such, they ground their determination within an ongoing history of struggle to establish equality. They thus locate themselves within the temporal continuum that lies at the base of the Marxist historical dialectic. A 30 year old communist argues:-

The basic principle o' the argument's pairt o' a continuing historic struggle, that we should ha' some sortae destiny o'er oor lives, ye ken. That people in big, high places, be it a



cracking organisation, ye ken, these big corporations that've been set-up, that once they've made a decision it shouldnae get tae come doon tae oor level tae the extent where it means virtual non-existence fur alot o' people, ye ken. So we should be able tae shape oor destinies.

#### 9.10 Conclusion.

This chapter has sought to establish key factors in the attitudes of the miners during and after the 1984-85 miners' strike. It has been argued that the historical legacy played a major role in the solidarity and resolve of the mining area in Fife. Yet has also sought to show how the strike affected perceptions and orientations over the course of the year. Central to this has been a discussion of the ways this radicalised miners within the sample through experience of hardship and conflict. It was a year in which personal resources, strength and comradeship were tested. It was, in many ways a return to an earlier era, as new life was breathed into the communities and Union. It was psychologically, culturally and politically a year of hardening resolve. The strike acted to reaffirm the radicalism of radicals and give non-radicals greater political insights. Yet, although an educational process, the objective circumstances of the strike in many ways acted to undermine perceptual mechanisms among the miners already under assault from industrial decline. Fought in defence against long-term structural change, in the end the strike failed to gain its objectives. It is for these reasons that at the end of the strike there was both demoralisation and an enhanced radicalism.

Central to the chapter, however, has been the attitudes of the radical sections of the sample. It was among this group that we could see a fuller awareness of the failures of the miners' struggle, yet also a greater determination and preparedness to fight on in the future which, it was argued, was based on the political framing of meaning within which they understood the strike and its conclusion. Yet the strike also served to highlight that the tradition of radical support in the county is



under assault as objective and ideological change weakens its base among the miners.

Consequently, although a year of solidarity in Fife, in many ways the strike served to accelerate the rate of decline by expending energy and highlighting both the miners' inability to prevent change and the decline of the Communist Party. Central to this is the removal of the power to a national level; that is, that the collectivism of the Fife miners was little able to affect decisions that would crucially affect their lives. The radical region was powerless in a national conflict to effect outcomes no matter their local strength.

Yet the strike, by reinforcing the beliefs of radicals, and radicalising other miners, would have vital consequences for the perception of the miners into the future. The strike cannot be erased from the minds of those who were involved. How these beliefs could be sustained would be dependent upon the climate of the industry in the aftermath.



## CHAPTER TEN.

## THE AFTERMATH: CONTRADICTIONS REVEALED.

10.1 Introduction.

While the militants remained resilient and stoical, some of the fatalists became more than ever convinced of the inevitability of their kind always being at the bottom of the pile - others joined the militants[1].

Thus Lane and Roberts found the workers at Pilkingtons glass works after their strike in the early 1970s. Whilst the terms employed differ to those used during the preceding chapters, the classification of different types of worker fit the general framework of analysis that has been drawn upon earlier. As we have seen, the Fife miners did respond differently to the strike and its conclusion, and thus the questions requiring solution must be as to how elements within the sample experienced the aftermath, and for what reasons were some better able than others to withstand what was soon realised to be the further decline of their industry.

Although Fife was a solid area during the strike as a whole, there is a great deal of difference in attitude to be found among the men in the aftermath. As we have seen during the last chapter, the miners responded differentially to the defeat and the splits within their Union, yet outlooks have been compounded by the men's experiences in the industry since the return to work. On a material level, the Fife miners were considerably much weakened after the strike ended. As we have seen, there were three pits at the commencement of the strike - Comrie, Seafield and the Frances - employing some 3,818 men, plus a further 326 at CCW and some 3,153 at the Longannet Complex. However, only some 1,700 were to regain employment directly in the county with only two pits were to resuming operations in March 1985 as the Frances closed on the 4th February 1985 due to fire. Since that time it has continued functioning on a care and maintenance basis, with the workforce



reduced from some 722 men to 40, against the day that BC fulfils its periodic half-promise to redevelop it. Comrie's workforce dropped from an average of 723 in 1983-84 to just over 500 after the strike, and Seafield's from 1,763 to c. 1,050. The workforce at the Workshops dropped to under 280 men. These figures were reduced even further in the ensuing period as increasingly younger men chose to leave the industry on the generous redundancy terms offered up until March 1987; that is, of £1,000 per year worked.

As such, the aftermath has been characterised by a numerical weakness which, coming in the wake of defeat, has had important consequences both for morale and the ability to negotiate with the NCB. Yet whilst for some of the miners interviewed demoralisation was acute, due to the stark lessons learnt in the 'reality of power relations'[2], others showed a preparedness to attempt to reconstruct their Union and industry and, if necessary, engage in further industrial action. What requires explanation, therefore, is the grounds for demoralisation, and the ways in which some of the sample have managed to cope more positively with defeat. First, however, we need to look at the situation in which the Fife miners found themselves in the post-strike period.

#### 10.2 'Putting the Boot In'.

The problems of demoralisation are intimately connected to the perception of managerial position and attitudes since the end of the strike. The defeat of the strike is seen as having given management an ascendancy over the men which they are not hesitating to use. As one 50 year old Labour Party member comments:-

Ah realise that [the Union] are only daeing their best, ye ken, and they're kindae fighting a rearguard action noo in the NUM, ken, if ah could put it that way, but they havenae got the same negotiating power there at the end o' the strike. As ah say, the Coal Board have got the upper hand and they're daeing the dirty.



One of the major ways in which management are seen as being dictatorial is through eroding established agreements and concessions which previously existed in the pits[3]. By making work difficult or uncomfortable for the men, they are seen as enforcing a hard-line attitude which the Union, still weakened by the strike, has been unable to confront. Two quotations, both from unaligned miners in their 20s, employed after the strike at Seafield and CCW respectively, give examples of post-strike relations:-

Ye know, when ye were on the face, if they had one o' they hydraulic hoses burst and ye got soaked fra' heid tae foot at the stairt o' the shift, would ye expect tae wark 7/4 hoors like that? If ye were warking up on the surface ye'd expect tae gae in the van and sit doon if ye were rained off. Before, ye used tae get a concession tae gae up the pit 30 minutes earlier than everybody else. Or if ye were in that position ye'd get sent up the pit, ye know. That was before the strike. And noo there's **nothing** like that. As soon as ye're wet, that's yoo. "Tough!" ye know.

[Aifter the strikel when we were in there at furst they were imposing, like, regulations. Like ye've got tae wear safety glasses doon there, ye see. Noo, where before they'd say, "Would ye wear them?" They'd say, "If ye dinnae wear them ye'll be secked." And they staired sending boys hame and that, ken. Noo, that isnae the way tae educate the warkforce, "Ye'll dae it or ye'll be secked." And this staired coming-up. And the likes o' the people who warked during the strike, broke the strike, were put intae foremen's positions as puppets fur management, and they were wielding the whip on the men, ye see. And that's what happened. Ye werenae judged on yur ability. So ye've got a si'uation ye've got people managing doon there who 10 year ago would never have got in the positions that they're in the noo, and they're there because o' what they done, no' because o' their ability. Which made people who had ability resentful.

That BC are in a position in which they are able to act in such a way is seen as due to the fact that the miners are in a no-win situation. The further decline of the industry since the strike means that the Union is not in a position to react, as this would merely advance the opportunity to effect further closures. Indeed, there is a belief that management are trying to goad the men into action for this very reason. As such, whilst there has been local action in the area since the strike, the miners are



wary about what action they take, even if in defence of established practices, for fear of retaliation. One Labour Party member from Comrie, announcement for the closure of which came shortly after the interview, in August 1986, relates an incident:-

Oor delegate was in, over a dispute, wi' the manager a fortnight ago, talking tae the manager. And there was this boy in oor mine was being victimised. He was warking in wet conditions all the time and he wasnae ge'ing up the pit early, which is a condition we have got. And the man, 2 or 3 times before that, had been oot the road and up the pit hissel, and the rest o' the pit had followed him, in support. So the delegate was in, trying tae get this sorted oot. And the manager says, "Right. This man's secked. The boy on the face is secked." And the delegate [says], "What's he secked fur?" "He's secked," he says. Look, he's secked. Ah'm no' bothered. Ah'm no' pu'ing-up nae name here, and he's secked. Look, he's had the pit hame 3 times, it'll no' happen again. He's secked." The delegate says, "Look, ye cannae dae that." He says, "Ah'm daeing it," he says. "Ah'll tell ye what. If ye want ye can gae on strike. Ye can gae on strike fur a week, fur 2 weeks, fur 3 weeks. Ye can gae on strike fur a year. He's still secked." And that's the Coal Board's a'itude. They just don't gi' a damn anymair. And the men, aifter being oot fur a year and ge'ing their arses kicked, they're no' wanting tae dae it again because they dinnae think they'll win.

In the face of the loss of previous rights, the men have found it hard to sustain morale. As one young unaligned man argues:-

They've eroded everything that we've ever had. Ye know, things that ha' been negotiated fur they've taken away fra' us. And ah think they've just gradually demoralised everybody by daeing this.

If the strike was therefore in defence of the status quo, the loss of the strike has seen the erosion of the status quo, and the gains which that previous status had achieved. Consequently, there is a belief that the clock has turned back as the miners see the disappearance of the benefits for which their forefathers fought. Yet this situation is largely viewed as having been unavoidable in a climate in which management are not negotiating but imposing decisions upon the workforce. One young miner from



the Labour Party argues:-

It's a sortae fascism, ye know.... Like [wi'] consultative mee'ings and things like that. Like, before, we used tae ha' them every second wednesday, and then, like a tap, they can turn them aff and turn them on when they want, ye know. "We're no' having one this week, we'll have one next week." Or "We'll no' ha' one at all fur a few months," ye know. It's that position, ye know.

The lack of consultation and the closures which have taken place in the coalfield, both locally and nationally, since 1985 have created feelings of insecurity within the men. They no longer feel certain that they have a future in the mining industry. Two miners, one a Labour Party member from Comrie and the other an unaligned man from Seafield, speak of how they feel about the threat which hangs over their pits:-

When ah furst went intae the pits ah can aye mind just before ah went intae the pits, The Daily Record, the front page o' it in 74-75, the front page, 'King Coal.' Everybody's fu'ure in the mining industry is guaranteed fur life. 'King Coal' was the heidline. Big, bold-as-brass letters. And noo, there's nae King Coal nae mair, the fu'ure's that uncer'ain. Ah really couldnae hazard a guess as tae ma future.... Well, it's a threat hanging over me, and obviously the femily. Ah really don't know hoo tae respond tae that at the moment because ah've spoke tae other miners in the village, who are employed at other pits roond aboot, and they've all been told the same.

Och, it's terrible, terrible. Because ye just stairt thinking, "Och, God. What's happening next?" ye know. "Are they gaeing tae shut the pit?" We're overheated, everybody gets on edge, ye know. "Are we gaeing tae lose it?" ye know.

The insecurity facing the men has largely focused around what was seen as a lack of commitment to the county by BC which has engendered feelings of uncertainty about their long-term prospects in the industry. As has been stated, one source of insecurity became certainty in August 1986 when the announcement of closure came for Comrie. The Fife miners were thus reduced to Seafield, where manpower was cut from 820 to 680 through redundancies after the loss of one of their two faces, the L15, in January 1987; the Cowdenbeath Central Workshops, employing 115 men by December 1986, and Fifers working at the Longannet Complex just over the



Clackmannan border; at which some 1,886 men were employed in total by early 1987. Whilst these feelings of uncertainty had been being built up by a whole range of management tactics and decisions since the strike[4], it was in 1987 that matters came to a head when the failure to invest in a new face became a crucial indicator for the Seafield miners that their employment hung in the balance.

In the aftermath of the strike two faces, L15 and D19, were brought into operation to replace two older faces, L11 and D17, which were ceasing production. The fire necessitated that D19 be rushed into production. There thus grew an awareness among the men from this time that, with only one face working, investment for another face was imperative by summer 1987 if the pit was to stay open, as D19 had a life expectancy of under 2 years and development to bring a new face into production would take a roughly equivalent period. Yet the promises of a £10 million investment BC made on 6th May 1987 were dependent on maintaining a maximum production target of 4 tonnes per manshift; this based upon an ideal situation wherein there were no problems in maintaining constant coal shear. This created doubts among the men for several reasons. Firstly, Seafield, by its nature, was subject to geological conditions such as steep seams and coal prone to spontaneous combustion which created particular problems for working; but, further, the failure to maintain investment in equipment, and the drop in the numbers of skilled workers capable of repairing equipment through redundancy made the possibility of maintaining production ever more unlikely. The Scottish Coalfield Project notes:-

The problem lay in the rush to reduce manpower in January 1987 following the loss of the L.15 face in a fire. The workforce was then pruned.... But pruning hit just those groups of skilled engineers, electricians and fitters which the older pits such as Seafield are most in need of to make up for the lack of investment in new infrastructure[5].

As such, any difficulties which halted production were viewed with alarm for they placed the men's future in jeopardy, even



though the targets themselves were unfeasible, not least because of BC's failure adequately to equip the pit. Under such circumstances, the men's morale plummeted further. One unaligned 27 year old, interviewed at this time, explains:-

It's the problems o' blackmail. Just ge'ing blackmailed all the time. Ye know, "If ye don't produce the guids ye won't get anything." And if ye produce the guids ye're no' ge'ing anything, if ye know what ah mean. If ye produced the guids. And they've told us "If ye don't produce the guids yur pit's closing," right. And noo that we've produced the guids they're never coming-up wi' onything, investment tae give us securi'y. Tae get securi'y ye need development in a pit, ye see. Tae develop a section it'll take maybe 2 years. Noo, the D19 has only got a life expectancy o' maybe another 2 years. So it's "dae or die" type-thing. Ye've got tae develop noo or that's it.

With matters thus very much in the balance, the situation received a further check when the Board stated that a new manager was to come to the pit, William Kerr, who had a reputation in the coalfield as an authoritarian hard-liner. Consequently, the morale of the workforce was not significantly uplifted at this time, but, rather, mistrust grew as to BC's motives. One branch official in his 40s argues:-

They've telt us in one breath they're gi'ing us £10 million, and they've telt us wi' the next breath Wullie Kerr's coming tae the pit. If ye'd seen the men! Well, it was just the Union's Commi'ee there, just the officials o' the different Unions. If ye'd seen their faces, ye ken. Ah ken ah just shut ma eyes and shook ma heid, because ah ken Wullie Kerr.... Well, there's some o' the men suspicious. They say, "They're gi'ing us £10 million." And then they're saying, "Kerr's coming tae shut the pit. He'll ha' us oot on strike. Well, if we come oot on strike we ken they'll probably shut the pit." That's what some o' the men are saying, ye know.

As summer progressed and the investment was not forthcoming scepticism grew, and confidence waned for the men realised that every day of delay weakened the possibility to guarantee the pit's future. This can be seen from production figures covering this period, for whilst output rises from the end of May, just after the announcement of investment, from July there is a downturn in productivity as the men's hopes begin to fade[6]. Yet if lack



of investment and closures demoralised men, there was also a third factor which merely enhanced previous fears; namely, what was viewed as the deliberate attempts to undermine the industry through poor management. Both at Seafield and CCW, the haphazard loss of skilled men, and in CCW the putting-out of contracts to private enterprise, are seen as serving to undermine the nationalised industry[7]. One redundant communist recalls:-

Ye see, when ye've been in Workshops like this, that ye've given alot o' time tae, and when ye see the deliberate Board policy is tae get rid o' most o' the experienced men by redundancy. Tae clean-oot the skills o' the place, and gi' away yur wark tae private enterprise, wi' the probable ulterior motive o' shu'ing doon the place. And ye're seeing a lifetime o' wark being caught fra' underneath yur feet. And ye're attempting tae combat that policy by arguing, in a management team, **against** ge'ing rid o' all yur skilled men, **against** ge'ing rid o' all yur foremen, and inspectors, and all the key people in the place, **against** the policy o' privatisation where ye're being forced tae put wark oot tae private enterprise that ye clearly should ha' done yursel. All that kindae thing. And being told tae dae it, or else [it makes ye feel bi'erl].

It is under such circumstances it becomes easy to appreciate how much of the workforce, tired of the insecurity and uncertainty of their employment, has been eager to accept voluntary redundancy. It may be seen as an attempt to end what was viewed as the lack of control and self-determination over their lives caused by the unpredictability of the future. Never sure from day-to-day what would happen in the industry the men felt they were unable to make decisions for themselves and their families as they did not know for how long they would be employed. As one man in his 30s argues:-

Oor life tends tae be in a wee bit o' indecision at the moment. Fur instance, ah'd like tae buy the hoose, but ah dinnae want tae because ah dinnae know if ah'll have a job next year, or in two years time fra' noo. Ah'd really like tae buy the hoose, but if they shut the pit and offer me a transfer tae England ah'll have tae gae. Ah wouldnae like tae, ah wouldnae **want** tae gae, but ah'd **have** tae gae. So what dae ah dae?



Demoralisation stemming from job insecurity can be seen through both the decline in productivity, noted earlier, and from increasing absenteeism from summer 1987[8]. As the Seafield Colliery Working Party noted:-

All parts of the colliery were visited, the operations were observed and the men interviewed as to the reasons why productivity was so low at Seafield Colliery and what was required to increase production. The main factor which came out of the visits was the low morale of the men due to the uncertainty of what the future is for the colliery. The reason given for this was the lack of development of another faceline and all the rumours via the media as to the lack of a future at the colliery which have never been remarked on by the Corporation[9].

Yet there were also contrasting sentiments among the men. Whilst absenteeism increased among some miners others thought that, with the end of the local industry seemingly imminent, one must make the best of the opportunity to make money while it is still there. One 24 year old unaligned man from the Workshops explains:-

Ye see, what's happened since the end o' the strike is that everybody's got the idea that we're gaeing tae be finished soon, we're gaeing tae be finished warking. So ye get a cer'ain body o' opinion that is, "Well, we'll just make as much money as we can and when the day comes, the day comes."

As such, it can be seen that the atmosphere has been one in which, despite differences in reaction, many of the men have lost their faith in the future of the industry. Uncertainty has led to the erection of a remoteness in attitude, as if, exhausted by the violent fluctuations in fortune coming after an uncertain year of dispute, they no longer hold out hope but merely exist from day to day. One communist in his 50s argues:-

Ye see, the main reason Seafield wasnae gaeing, apairt fra' the geological reasons, was, in fact, the miners' hairts werenae in it. The boys werenae caring. They had had enough o' warking fur that kindae employer. They wouldnae ha' been tae upset if the pit had gone. Ye know, the young lads. They had the equipment, they had the coal, what they didnae have was the will. Because if ye've never warked in coal-mining it's a peculiar industry. Ah came fra' ootside it and there was ayeways that feeling about the pit. And there were feelings o' affection among everyone who warked at the pit fur the pit, and the need tae make the pit wark. Ah mean, miners



are one o' the verra few people who talk incessantly aboot their wark when they're away fra' it. Ye know, and tae wark in the pit, there's a cer'ain communi'y within the pit. And that was lost aifter the strike, because the boys had taken a hammering, [and] British Coal were an employer who were kicking them when they were doon. And the rebellion against that took place in a sortae perverted sense. "Ach, shut the bluidy pit. Let's away fra' this, we've had enough." Nae fighting against Coal Board policy, it was mair or less, "Shut the pit. Had enough." A'itudes were different. Ye just gae tae yur wark, and dae yur wark, and get yur pay. There wasnae that feeling fur the pit. Which is a change, a psychological change in people.

As this quotation indicates there is a sense in which elements within the workforce were almost seeking pit closures in order to escape the insecurity of employment and to reestablish control over their lives again. For many, there is a belief that BC were deliberately fostering such an environment for these very ends. One ex-member of management argues:-

Well, ah consider that that approach is a management tactic that's been verra successfully developed over many years. That ye create the conditions in which the men finally say, "Shut the bluidy pit and let's oot." They dae the same in factories. They did it in the steel industry. They create the atmosphere o' uncer'ainty that makes people finally say, "Ach, bugged it. Let's get oot. At least we'll know what we're daeing." But tae live in uncer'ainty all o' the time, that's no' just in the mining industry, it happens in a number o' industries, they did the same kindae thing. Ye create rumour, ye create doubt, ye create speculation, ye apply the carrot tae gae oot on generous redundancy terms that might no' be there la'er on. And they create a climate in which, at the end o' the day, the employer is able tae say, "The men shut the place." That has happened. "The men shut the place." It wouldae been the men that shut Seafield. Because they wouldnae produce the guids. And they were producing the guids. So ye create an atmosphere in which people want tae be free o' the anxiety, and the worry, and are relieved, in a sense, when somebody says, "The place shuts next week." There's a cer'ain relief. Noo. obviously once they've been 3 months on the dole, and they've had time tae think aboot it, [they realise] maybe they've made a mistake.

The redundancy terms, the 'Big Penny' as it is known, lasted up until March 1987, and was most certainly an inducement for many men, especially the older ones. Faced with a choice between a possibly short-term employment and a large lump sum, even young



men acknowledge that the offer was one which it might be foolhardy to reject. One redundant man argues:-

Ye know hoo there was this special [redundancy scheme]. Ah mean, a lad who'd warked maybe 20, 30 years in the pit would ha' come oot wi' £20 or £30,000 or something. And tae anybody who's never had that kindae money it's alot o' money. And the special redundancy terms under the EEC were ending last March. Up till then they couldae shut [Seafield]. They couldae shut almost any pit in Scotland. Ah'm sure o' that. They couldae shut the Workshops. Noo, ah don't know. Ah think it would be mair difficult noo. If ye've warked all yur days and ye've never seen £10, or £20, or £30,000, and ye're thinking tae yursel, "Well, maybe ah'll get some kindae job," ye know. "Ah've got an uncle who's got a pub, ah can maybe get a job there." Or "Ah know somebody who warks fur somebody". There's ayeways that feeling, "Well, at least ah've got something in ma hond. Ah don't like warking fur British Coal any mair. Ah might pick-up a job somewhere. Ach, bugger it. Let's gae."

Confronted by tempting amounts of money, few men were prepared to give full consideration to remarks such as that in the next quotation, from a man who found the appeal of redundancy soon wore off:-

Ah must be quite honest aboot this, that ah got a large sum o' money there and ah've spent most o' it. And ah'm sorry that ah had tae take redundancy but there was nae choice aboot it. But ah believe if they were opening the Frances up in the morning, ah'd get ma pit-hat oot. And it might take me a wee couple o' weeks tae readjust tae it, but ah think ah would be happier, ye ken. Because, ye see, ah've got tae say that the last 3 year o' ma life has been lost, ken. Aboot 3 year o' ma life. Ah had a year on strike, and then it's aboot 2 year o' redundancy. Redundancy's no' fur a man. Naw. A man should be warking. [Ma fear's are] financial, financial, ken. In fact, ah'd just like tae think aboot that. Because, ah mean, at ma age, 49, if young people cannae get a job what chance ha' ah got, ye ken?

For younger men, however, the prospect of closures was bleaker, for not only would they have received lesser sums, but the unemployment situation, whether in Fife or in relation to decreasing openings within the coal industry, meant the chances of finding alternative employment were few. Compared to the beginning of 1984, when there were 11 pits left in Scotland, by summer 1987 there were only 5 left. Thus declining



possibilities, given the necessity of probably having to support a young and, therefore, dependent family, was the source of much despondency. The same man speaks of the situation facing the younger generation:-

Fur the furst generations o' miners there was plenty o' pits. Ye could move fra' pit tae pit. [And] in the 1960s in Fife, they aye went fra' Bowhill, Kinglassie, right, doon intae England. Miners, traditional miners, tae get a job. But noo, as ah'm saying, where daes, like, Iain gae if Seafield shuts? There's nae place tae move tae. And seeing the Coal Board, everybody's jumping on this wagon that tae get rid o' yur warkforce ye just dangle the carrot in front o' them, the redundancy, right. But there again, in that way ye shut the pits doon. There's hairdly a pit left in Scotland. In Scotland, ah'm no' just talking aboot Fife, in Scotland. Where dae they gae, ken?

In this sense, the contemporary situation is one which has never been witnessed before in the industry. Whilst there have been depressions and upheavals in the past, the miners have not before had to confront a scenario such as that facing them now; namely, the end of the Fife, and possibly the Scottish, coal mining industry. A retired communist describes the predicament:-

Noo, we didnae have that [tremendous demoralisation] tae the same extent aifter the '26 defeat, because there was still faith in the mining industry. But this woman noo has **destroyed** this faith through destroying the pits, through destroying their communi'ies. So they have nae fu'ure.

Thus, the years since the strike have been ones in which the miners have been confronted by what is seen as a victor determined to enjoy that victory, whilst their own strength has been continually depleted both numerically, in relation to pit closures and the loss of jobs resulting from redundancies, and in a personal sense, as despondency and uncertainty rob miners of the will to continue. Yet there are those who have found it easier to sustain morale in the wake of defeat and in the face of worsening objective conditions. Despite the current crisis certain elements have proved better able to come to terms with the situation and view their future, if not optimistically, at least objectively, in an attempt to regain their previous bargaining position and,



thereby, to secure the end to decline. Whilst all those interviewed stated they would be prepared to strike again for the industry, therefore, one needs to identify those who are positively seeking to understand the previous defeat in order to guarantee the way forward. As such, in the next two sections we shall attempt to establish the major differences differentiating the demoralised from those with the will to fight on.

### 10.3 'The Pits Are Away'.

There is a common perception to be found among the men that there are strong divisions between those who will continue to work for the industry and those who have given up the battle. One Labour Party Union official in his 30s argues:-

Ye've got tae get the members behind ye. As ah say, ah never stop arguing wi' the men doon the pit, fur tae try and build them up. But alot o' them say, "It's nae guid fighting back." That's the men's a'itude at the moment. The majori'y o' the men. It's nae guid fighting back. Accept. Accept. Accept, whatever they want." Tae me, oor job is tae keep the men's morale up, try and get the enthusiasm back up, and then fight fur oor rights.

This has proved hard for officials to achieve given the circumstances prevalent in the coalfield, but it is worsened by the perception that the miners were beaten despite being correct in their claims; that is, having witnessed that truth cannot ensure victory, there is no longer any point in fighting. One 39 year old unaligned man states:-

We were trying tae save jobs. There's alot o' pits been closed that didnae have tae be closed. These pits could ha' still been warking, producing coal. There could ha' been alot o' jobs kept there. Ye've got alot o' young people coming up nowadays [and] the jobs could ha' been been there fur them. And that's what we were on strike fur, tae try and save wark, save jobs fur them. [The strike] broadened ma ootlook wi' the Coal Board. Because ye're warking fur a firm, and it just showed ye what they were prepared tae dae tae beat the miners, along wi' the government and that. Ah say yet they would ha' bankrupted the country tae beat us. Yes, ah would say they went bluidy close tae it!



Given the opposition that was mounted to the strike there is a feeling among sections of the workforce that they would no longer be able to engage in effective industrial action to ensure the safety of their industry. As such, '84-85 was a qualitatively different strike which will not happen again as now the workers have learnt that resistance is ineffectual. The forces arraigned against the miners were of such a magnitude that the potentiality for industrial action has been most sharply curtailed. One unaligned miner argues:-

Ah would say [the strike] was a separate event. Ah would say it was a one-off. Because ah don't think ye'll ever get a strike in the mining industry like that last one. Ah don't think ye'll ever get that again. Well, no' as lang as ye've got the likes o' Maggie Thatcher, and ah was gaeing tae say Ian MacGregor but he's no' there anymair. But the government that's in at the moment, ah cannae see ever having a lang strike like that again because the men, ah'll say why no', ah feel that the men will **know**, in the end, that they'll no' win. The Coal Board, or British Coal, alang wi' **ony** government, would beat ye.

With such beliefs it becomes easy to understand why so many men are subject to despondency. They believe that they can do nothing to gain control over the forces governing their lives. Rather than trying to conceptualise ways in which workers may seek to establish new forms of action other than the established tactics of all-out strikes, picketing etc., they see no way forward. The Union is no longer seen as capable of crucially affecting conditions of employment. All that can be done is to carry on working as best one can under uncertain physical conditions in order to attempt to ensure the pit stays open:-

Well, all ah can dae is just keep on daeing ma wark and try and help produce mair coal. That's what ah'm there fur.

Such a sentiment is of interest for the implicit message it carries about political understanding: that is, that whilst non-politicised miners can appreciate how a government may interfere politically in the industrial sphere, it fails to take recognition that workers may attempt to use political power during a period in which it appears their industrial muscle is no longer



capable of gaining victory; that is, that they can appreciate how government may use all types of power, yet cannot perceive themselves as having any power at all in the wake of defeat. Their one strength was mobilised, found wanting, and lost for all time. The despondency to be found among those without a coherent set of political beliefs may thus be seen in terms of a perception that 'people in power' have all the weapons whilst the workers are powerless to respond when all of these are brought into force. Thus, the strike has served to 'prove' to them their ultimate lack of control over their lives. In the aftermath, what faith they had in their ability to seek to determine their lives has been lost. They fail to see alternatives. It is consequently among such men that one finds the belief that now the Union is powerless to manoeuvre on all but the most mundane of issues; that it is no longer capable of taking part in larger political and structural negotiations on the industry's future. Two politically-unaligned men argue in such a vein:-

Well, the main thing [the Union] should be daeing is, like ah'm saying, looking aifter their members' position wi' the Coal Board. Trying tae get them be'er conditions; i.e., be'er pay, be'er holidays, mair rest days. Things like that.

Well, ah dinnae know [what the union should be daeing], like. Aboot what they're daeing just noo, right, all they can dae is deal wi' grievances. If ye gae tae them wi' a grievance they can only deal wi' it as far as they can, right. So as far as rank-and-file members gae, if ye've got a problem, ye gae tae the Union and they deal wi' it. Ken, that's all they can dae fur me. They cannae dae mair fur me. That's it.

There is a belief, therefore, among non-radical miners that the unions can only function on a routine level rather than on a organisational level in the aftermath. Political action having failed, they believe there is no longer any point to radicalism. One retired communist likens the situation to the aftermath of the 1926 strike:-

They've lost their faith in militancy. It's a similar period tae what happened aifter '26, when right-wingers got elected all over the place. Because if ye've decided ye cannae win by militancy it would be senseless tae elect militant leaders. So they elect other leaders, compromise leaders.



Further, there is also an assumption that the future is dependent purely on economic factors rather than political ones; that is, that the decision to keep the industry operating within the county will be determined by economic viability only, rather than on political decisions. Two unaligned Seafield miners interviewed between April and June 1987, one in his late 40s, the other in his late 20s, both sum-up this belief:-

Well, ah'd say this next 6 month or so, if we try and get back up tae near enough the 4 tonne, ah think everything'll come a' right. Because the coal, the amount o' coal that's doon that pit, it's no' real. Well, ah ken we're travelling a wee bit fur it, ye know, but as ah say, wi' all the different shifts and that, we're ge'ing shear near the full day as it is.

Well, in this area, unless there's success on this face, which is a problem that there is, there's no' been alot o' success on the faces, but the only problem that's really holding us back is the heatings that we get. It's all spontaneous combustions and things like that. So the only things holding us back are these things. We've only got one face left, and everything hinges on that noo. There's nothing ye can dae about spontaneous combustion.

The above quotations therefore indicate that among non-politicised miners that demoralisation is determined by two types of assumption; namely, that the Union is unable to participate in structural decision-making, but that, further, such decisions are ultimately outwith the miners control anyway, being dependent upon geological or economic factors. There is nothing that can be done. Such men do not have the analytical framework of systemised belief within which to place their experiences and try to formulate a new line. They have little perception of what Giddens calls the 'dialectic of control'; that is, that power is a force possessed by all actors and groups, but which may vary in balance over time.

Related to this, one can perceive that among such men there is a lack of dynamism to be found within beliefs; that is, that they see the future as being characterised by the same factors which dominated the strike and its aftermath, and do not see that



structural forces may again change in their favour. Whilst admittedly a pit lost is a pit lost for all time, they do not envisualise ways in which new strategies may be evolved to attempt to secure a future in the industry. The mining industry has been lost, therefore the only way forward is in a new industry. In such circumstances, one may more readily perceive why men are chosing to leave the industry. If the strike was the miners' 'last stand', then the battle has been lost. A 50 year old unaligned man who took his redundancy argued:-

We went back defeated, ye ken, and we got it intae oor heid that we lost the ba'le but no' the war. But me, as far as ah'm concerned, ah think the war is lost.

#### 10.4 The Miners' Next Step.

For those of the sample who were politically articulate, be they either communist or socialist, there can also be found the belief that the battle was right, yet rather than succumb to the demoralisation of defeat, they believe one must analyse the ground upon which it was fought to establish in what ways this contained the seeds of that defeat. These failures, as we saw at the end of the last chapter, were largely seen as concerned with tactical inadequacies, the superior strength of the NCB and government and the inability to get the miners' message across when confronted by the propaganda of the media. Yet among the politicised this awareness has not led to despondency, but the need to confront the issue. One young communist argues:-

We are now in a period where the miners fought, and their families fought, a tremendous struggle. And it was a unique struggle because it wasnae fur wages, it was fur communi'ies and it was fur jobs. And obviously when ye reflect back, and it's no' being critical o' anyone, mistakes were made, and mistakes are **ayeways** made. But ye've got tae analyse where the mistakes are and ensure they don't happen again.

This analysis is necessitated by the fact that they do perceive a future for their industry, and that they can only secure this through a critique which allows them to construct the means to go forward on a new path. One 30 year old expresses this belief in



the future, yet also argues that hard work is required to instill the will to secure this within the industry:-

Given the fact that the coal that lies between Seafield and the Frances and oot intae the North Sea is a 150 square miles o' coal,... it's one o' the biggest proven reserves o' coal in Europe, there is a coal mining fu'ure here. If ye take it on that basis. But the fact that the coal's there daesnae necessarily mean it's gaeing tae be mined. What's needed is the will tae mine it. The political will, if ye want tae use that expression. And that isnae here. When ye talk tae men at the Workshops and in the mines, they have verra li'le faith in the fu'ure o' the mining industry. There are people that have faith, faith in the mining industry, because they want tae privatise it. So they've realised the potential o' the mining industry. And they sometimes have mair faith than what we actually dae as miners oorsels.

This quotation is interesting because it shows a clear awareness of the problems confronting the miners; that is, of the need to rekindle faith among the miners and also that the future will not necessarily be secured by the mere presence of coal, but is dependent on political forces concerned with the wish to establish a viable coal industry. The issue is perceived not as a purely economic one, therefore, but as a political one. Yet further, there is a belief that the miners have the **potentiality** to affect the decisions which will determine their future. What is seen as requiring resolution is how best to ensure that they can participate within this process. One of the necessities, they believe, is that the Union, at a national level, attempts to take its place once more in discussions. But to do this it must come to terms with the reality of the post-strike circumstances. One 55 year old communist argues:-

The Union hasnae got much influence wi' British Coal because the Union's no' **talking** tae British Coal. At national level they're no' **talking**. And ah think, tae a degree, they're misguided in that. Ah think they're taking-up a position that's no' helpful tae the langer-term interests o' the miners. Ah think that leaders o' the miners' Union don't seem tae ha' learnt some o' the lessons o' the miners' strike **theirsels**. They're still saying the same things, and they're no' living in reality. Ah mean, ah think Scargill's like that. Well, Scargill was still claiming that the strike was a victory at a cer'ain stage, ye know. He makes threats aboot actions that can be taken, and makes claims that **cannae** be justified. Ah mean, ah think there were mistakes made during



the strike. Ah think there were **major** mistakes made during the strike. But ah don't blame them, in that sense, because people make mistakes in leadership. But no' tae have learnt fra' that mistake is the **biggest** sin. And that, in ma view, is Scargill's tremendous weakness.

As such, a new line needs to be established which, confronting contemporary actuality, at the same time provides the means to act out into the future. If the traditional patterns of industrial action have proved ineffectual against a state willing to mobilise all its forces, then, it is believed, one must develop new ways of securing ones aims. A communist argues:-

Ah think [the strike's] brought-aboot a whole new **thinking** aboot industrial actions and struggle.... In ma opinion, nae single union can take on the power o' the state and hope tae beat it by industrial muscle. Noo, ah think that's the lesson o' that, or the **major** lesson o' that: that we live in a different kind o' socie'y. It's verra difficult tae conduct industrial struggle nowadays.

If a new direction is required, radicals are certain at least that this should incorporate 2 basic prerequisites; firstly, that the message should be taken to the membership to reunite the men, and that, secondly, it must be taken to the public in order that they comprehend that the issues about which the miners are fighting are of paramount concern to them also. Two quotations from communists, one in his 30s, the other in his 50s, show this belief:-

Ah would think there were 2 or 3 **principled** ideas which the miners, **every** miner, will respond tae. Well, the concepts o' trade-unionism as being a way o' advancing, o' be'ering yur warking environment, fur instance. Whereas other warkplaces ha' got an anti-union a'itude in their way o' warking. So ye've got **that**. Ah think obviously when the UDM staired up in the No'ingham places there was a bit o' opposition, but ah think there's alot o' ideas that **they** have that we share as well. So that even within what is particularly a management union, a "bosses union", **they** have ideas which **we** share. And so that even wi' the development o' that anti-Scargill type union they still havenae broken the affinity **between** miners.... Ah would like tae think it would continue. Ah don't think it will continue on its own, ah don't think it's a perpetual motion thing where it will ayeways sortae be this way. Ah think we have tae dae cer'ain things tae **ensure** it will continue. Well, furst o' all having a strang, militant trade union. Ah think that's verra important, because we have



tae combat the ideas that come fra' ootside through the media or whatever. So just on that sortae level, the ideological level, the Union's got tae be there.

Well, ah think masel that the Union should mount communi'y campaigns. As a communist ah'm a great believer in campaigns being rooted in the communi'y. Ah think the British people should know the coal industry is theirs. And the Union should take that campaign oot, intae the communi'y. Away fra' the pits and oot intae the other factories, the streets, the hooses, and put it tae the British people what's happening tae their industry.

As such, it can be seen that amongst those with a politicised world view that there is a belief that the miners have a case which can be taken to people and gain support, but which requires a new orientation if it is to succeed in contemporary circumstances. Among radicals, therefore, can be found a faith in their ability to affect their circumstances; that they have power to direct their lives. They thus display knowledgeability and capability as actors, for they believe that they can comprehend and actively intervene in their futures. We can, through their observations, perceive an awareness of the changing nature of the dialectic of control, which places them within the flow of time.

Yet this optimism is not based purely on a philosophical belief in the worth of their claims, but also on their particular assessment of the weapons that they have at their disposal: the men. Whilst appreciating that the end of the strike and subsequent events have demoralised the men, such miners also believe that there is a continuing commitment to the industry which can be mobilised. There is an awareness that the strike, for many, was a radicalising experience which drew many of the previously uncommitted into the Union and who form a bedrock of support. Thus, although the strike was debilitating, it gave a new strength also. One 33 year old communist argues:-

Since the strike we've lost approximately aboot 45, maybe as much as 50% o' the manpower in Fife. So numerically, ah'd say, the Union's weak that way, but it's strang in other ways. Ye've got young loddies who were never interested in the Union as such before the strike who, during the strike, threw their involvement in pickets and demonstrations, ye know, and they're intae the Union noo. And ah'd say we gained strength



that way. Plus alot o' men gained experience. Ah know the experience ah gained during the strike stonds me in guid stead fur alot o' reasons. But the experience the younger men got can only be guid fur the Union. And no' just the men but the women as well, because, ye know, the Women's Action Groups are still functioning. Ye know, they're moving intae other areas. Ye know, campaigning fur the Health Service etc., etc..

Two other factors, superficially negative ones, are regarded as encouraging a solidarity between the men; the numerical decline in the pits and the dictatorial attitude of British Coal. The following two quotations amply demonstrate the rationale behind this seeming paradox; one from a Seafield official and the other from an official in the Workshops:-

Ah would say, on the whole, ye ken, if somebody said tae one man, "Ye're ge'ing sent hame," noo, like, ye'd probably find the whole pit would be idle. Oor pit wasnae as solid as that before the strike, it's just fra' the rundoon o' manpower, the pit's gone back tae hoo the pits, years ago, used tae be, ken. If one man was sent hame years ago, because everybody **knew** one another, ah'm talking aboot the mining communi'ies again, everybody knew one another, and if one got sent hame, the rest were gaeing hame, ye see. Well, noo we're ontae 4 shift, 5 shift warking in Seafield, and ye're doon tae a group o' men, maybe aboot 80 men, and if onybody says onything tae one, every one o' they men **ken** one another, see, and if somebody says, "Ye're gaeing hame," the rest are gaeing. That's what ah **like** aboot it, aboot the pit noo again. Because it's strang, it's hoo the pit **should** ha' been all alang. Ye see, Seafield Colliery, at one time, it was that big they were having trouble towing the men doon the pit in time, right. And any man that wasnae doon the pit at quarter past six was sent hame. Well, ye're maybe oot yur bed at half past four in the morning, and ye get forrad and the hond comes doon. "Ye're no' gaeing doon tae yur wark the day." And their neighbours used tae be standing, ye had a 100 and odd men **through**, ken, that would be the last tow gaeing doon. They used tae stond and laugh at their neighbour ge'ing sent hame. Would ye believe that? And that's what was gaeing on doon there. But noo, it's turned full circle, it's back tae a tight bunch o' men again. And it's guid, that's hoo it **should** be. Because it keeps management on their toes. They've got tae watch what they say noo. Fur example, last week there was a man, he forgot his respirator. He was doon the pit, that was before the boggies went away in the mine, ye mind it. And the gaffer and the fireman, they were roaring tae get the boggies away. And ah says, "Wait a minute. We're waiting on oor neighbour coming back doon the pit." "Forget him." Ach, but all the men came aff the boggies. All the men came back aff the boggies. That just shows ye hoo united they are



again. Well, the Coal Board's brung that on theirsels. Which was a guid idea. It was guid fur us.

Ye see, what happened in there was that they went on and on and on. The management, ye ken. Wee things imposed on us and that, all the time. And that went on fur a year and a half, ye see. And then they sent somebody hame one day, ye see, fur no' wearing his glasses and that. Told him he was secked and everything. It was to'ally trivial and everybody walked oot. And it had aye been a question, ye see. They'd been trying tae put turners against fitters and, ken, all they wee things, ken. One against the other all the time, and they'd warked-up that many grievances wi' people, ye see. Ken, simple things like if maybe a boy was warking at night, right, and he should get a meal, ye see, fra' the Coal Board. And they wouldnae gi' him it, ken. "Ye'll dae it." And then, say, a boy was due his holidays and, "Ye'll wark this machine," ken. "Ye'll wark it fur 3 days." And he'd say, "Well, that's me gaeing." "No. Ye're no' gaeing. Ye'll wark it 3 days or we'll seck ye." Ken, things like this. So everybody had their ain wee grievances, ye see, and that all built-up tae a heid and everybody went hame and just says, "Ach, well, so what? We're sick o' it all," ye see. And then it happened again.

In many ways this may manifest itself as an unprincipled militancy, as an urge to hit back after what is seen as an era of unjust imposition. The events of the post-strike period, with the accompanying reductions in manpower and conditions has induced a feeling of impotence which induces an anger against management. One communist in his 50s explains the hedonistic tendencies to be found among the men:-

They are militant in spirit at the moment but don't have the power tae dae much aboot it. There is a militant spirit among them which can only express itsel in a sortae rebellion, as opposed tae being able tae use the power they've got tae gain anything, because at the moment they don't have much power. Aye, there's a militancy there, and it's the young lads who're left, the alder boys ha' got oot. Ah mean, almost every Union leadership at every pit has gone because the men who were in the leadership were at an age where, because o' the strike, the aiftermath, demoralisation, the attraction o' money, the feeling that it's hellish warking fur British Coal, [they left] and ha' left the young, tae a degree undisciplined people, who are rebellious by na'ure. Militant. Would love tae get their revenge. Hate what's being done tae them. Lang fur the day when they can turn the tables, but at the moment know that the Union is in such a position that they cannae dae much aboot what's happening.



Yet if this appears in many ways somewhat nihilistic, there is also a feeling that those who have chosen to stay have done so because they wish to fight for the industry, and would like to ensure its continuance. One Labour Party member in his late 30s argues:-

Ah think the Coal Board, or British Coal as they call theirsels noo, are ge'ing rid o' alot o' men, but what they're gaeing tae be left wi', and ah don't think they've realised this, is a haired-core o' militant miners. Because it's no' every miner that wants oot. Because that's the men that want tae wark. That's the men that want tae wark in the industry. And ah think they're gaeing tae make a stick tae break their ain back. We'll be kicked, ah mean, we're kicked the noo, but ye'll only take so much, and we'll be back. We'll come back again.

As such there can be found a section of miners committed to remaining in the industry many of whom, as the last quotation indicates, are those whose political beliefs enable them both to sustain a faith in the industry and the willingness to fight for it. Yet such beliefs are also based, for radical miners, upon a perception of the changing nature of historical circumstances. Unlike the comments of the non-aligned men which envisualised no progression, the above quotations show a perception of the recent past and present interacting; that is, that they show how the miners' perceptions are based within the experiences they have undergone, yet that these conditions are already changing in such a way that contains the potentiality for future action. Consequently, a distinguishing feature of the radical miners is their perception of their location within the temporal continuum. If attitudes and actions are based within the sum of previous experience, these industrial and personal goals are tied in, and rooted by, political visions of a more equitable future. A young communist argues:-

The coal's there if the will's there tae mine it, and the will's there tae integrate it in a fuel policy and, further, use it fur the be'erment o' the whole o' socie'y, no' just fur miners, tae gi' them jobs or whatever. Then we'll have a fu'ure.



This ability to sustain a vision of the future is reinforced by long-term perceptions which envisualise a renewed viability in the industry in the face of the decline in other power sources. One young communist argues:-

Well, ah firmly believe in the mining industry because, furst o' all, it's a guid place tae wark in the sense that we've got new technology coming in. Fra' a craftsman's point o' view it's a bit o' a challenge, the changes that've taken place. Fra' the Union's point o' view, the mining industry is probably gaeing tae be mair and mair needed as the years gae. Wi' the running oot o' oil and gas and whatever, coal will become mair and mair a commodi'y that's viable. The new sciences that'll harness coal tae make it intae petrol and make it intae gas and all that. All that'll have tae come on stream. So in the lang-term, coal, given the sort o' political will that'll help it tae flourish, will be an exciting industry tae be pairt o'. There'll no' be the same amount o' miners, and the same size o' communi'ies, that's virtually guaranteed, but in the labour movement the miners, and the leadership within it, will produce the leadership fur the entire labour movement so that we can gae forrad in a number o' progressive things. But we'll have tae change tae, we'll have tae change wi' socie'y as well, the miners, because sometimes we're a wee bit conservative and dinnae want tae change.

Therefore, as we have seen there is a belief that a turn-around is possible to be found among those with sytematised political beliefs, and a willingness to participate in this when it occurs. To this end, miners are attempting to reconstruct a strategy which will enable them to regain some degree of control over their industry to ensure that this comes about. In many senses this is because they realise that, with the imminent demise of the industry locally they have little to lose. One communist in his 30s argues:-

Tae say that we've no' got power is no' really true. There's alot o' things we can dae. Ye know, public campaigns tae save the coal industry. Things ye can dae tae save yur jobs. Ah'm no' saying they're successful, but at least ye're no' powerless. Ye know what ah mean, ye can gae oot on the streets and at least fight. Ah mean, ah fought fur thirteen months tae save ma pit and save ma job, and if it was necessary tae dae it again, ah'd dae it. Because ah'm in a position it's a case it's either fight or gae doon. And if ah gae doon, at least ah'm gaeing tae gae doon fighting. Ah dinnae want tae see the pit shut. No' just fra' ma personal point o' view but, ah mean, the knock-on effect fur the



economy o' Fife would be disastrous fur a stairt. Ye know, ye've got tae look tae the kids. Ah think it would be wrang, **morally** wrang, tae throw away a national asset the likes o' what we've got. No' just at Seafield, by the way, but in other pits.

This quotation is interesting because of the multiplicity of concerns it expresses. It links moral and economic arguments into a political statement which at the same time connects these to future obligations. Yet there can also be found an awareness of this need to fight because of past obligations also. A 27 year old communist states:-

[Fife is militant] because o' its past history. Ah think it's been bred intae the miners doon the generations, the militancy o' the Fife miners. They've ayeways been able tae stick up fur theirsels.... They've **ayeways** rallied together. They've **ayeways** stood by on any important issue that's faced them, and tried tae see it oot tae the bi'er end... because Fife sees itsel as a closed mining communi'y. Ah think also they look at it as a **duty** tae their forefeythers in this area.

Thus past, present and future are linked in their beliefs about possible ways forward. Tied to this is a faith in the possible effectivity of action. As the following three quotations from radicals, two in their 30s and one in his 70s, there is a strong desire to reverse the fortunes of their industry and a belief that they can win should they attempt to do so:-

Ah'm in a si'uation noo at the pit, ah've never stopped arguing since we went back fra' the strike. Ah had it today, like, folk are talking aboot Comrie pit ge'ing shut, what are we gaeing tae dae? Ah said, "Look, ye ha' tae try and dae something here. Ye cannae just accept." "What can we dae?" is their reply. Ah said, "Look, ye've got tae try and dae something. Ye cannae just sit back and let it happen." Me, personally, ah want the men back on strike again. It's no' just because we lost the last one. We've got tae reverse this. Because ah think that's the thing tae dae. Ye cannae just sit back and let it happen tae us again.

Ah think there's a great understanding noo among the mass o' warkers that the defeat o' the miners was a defeat fur them, and they're all suffering the consequences o' it. And ah think if the miners decided tae strike, and the leadership was be'er organised, then ah think they could win.

Ah believe, if there was another strike, if somehoo we could manage tae get the men oot again, we'd win it in **months**.



Because people noo realise what happened in the '84 strike, and the cost o' the '84 strike is only just stairting [tae be appreciated]. That people in business are aware o' the cost. Ah mean, big business daesnae like losing and ge'ing hurt. Irrespective o' who won or who lost business was hurt there. Ah dinnae believe they would want tae see it happen again. Ah think they would put pressure on the government, "Dinnae let this gae on fur a year, or 6 months. We don't want it. We cannae afford it. We had oor fingers stung the last time. Although the miners got beat, at what cost?" And that's why ah would love tae see another strike. Love it. Because ah think we'd kick their arses.

Yet even should the decline prove irreversible there is a commitment that political action will continue even if, of necessity, outwith the industry. Already radicals who have retired or are redundant have moved into other areas of activity; whether the concerns of pensioners, District or Regional Councils, Community Councils or whatever. As the industry faces imminent demise, therefore, radicals are preparing for new battles to fight. Two quotations from men in their 30s, the first an active Labour Party member and the other in the CP speculate:-

As ah see the fu'ure, when we're all oot the pits, there's nae pits left, we'll still get that bond because we've had it in the past, but it will gradually die oot. It's maybe ma fears, that there'll be nae miners left, that there'll maybe be nae mining communi'y, ah could be mistaken there. But the feelings ye've had will still cairry through. Aye, ah'm hopeful.

Who knows what will happen. Ah mean, come back tae Cowdenbeath in 10, 15 years time. It could be a to'allly new picture. Ah mean, fur a stairt, all the pits in Fife could be shut. But if they shut Seafieid pit and ah went unemployed or ah got a job at Mossmorran, ah'm no' gaeing tae be ony less militant or left-wing in ma a'itude than ah was. Ye know, ah'll continue in that vein. Ah think that the tradition will be passed on at the communi'y level. But no' at the same level as when the pits were in operation, if ye get ma drift. Because as ah say, the Communist Party and, tae a cer'ain extent, the Labour Party in this area have ayeways been progressive in arguing and campaigning on the streets on the various issues. So ah cannae see that stopping just fur the fact there's nae mair miners left. Ah think that the communi'y, the traditions inherent in this communi'y, will continue being a progressive force in the county. Ye know, ah cannae see them dying aff.



10.5 Conclusion.

As we have seen the decline in the mining industry since the end of the 1984-85 strike has enhanced the polarisation of opinion to be found on the return to work. Whilst some perceive no future in an industry which continues to be rundown - either through closure, lack of investment or deliberate policies to undermine the industry's viability - and have become wearied by the uncertainties which this poses for their lives, others manifest a continued commitment to the industry. It is among the politically articulate that one can discover an awareness of the need to rethink tactics and a preparedness to fight on. Whilst they are aware that their industry is suffering from severe problems, there is also an optimism based on the perception of untapped strength to be found among the workforce, and the potentiality for public support. Thus, as we have seen, political beliefs can help them sustain their faith by providing a framework within which to analyse the situation confronting them and attempt to forge a new path.

Further, whilst the politically-unaligned see the flow of history only in terms of the transition from previous strength to current weakness, it is among the politicised that one can discern the ability to extrapolate on from this to assert that weakness may also, with commitment, become strength. We can see, through these observations, a conviction of a possible resurgence for the Union and industry which implies a perception of a 'dialectic of control' which varies between groups in changing spatio-temporal circumstances. They do not underestimate the task that lies ahead, but appreciate that it must be undertaken. Indeed, in the final analysis it is the awareness of history that provides a major source of motivation, in that a perception of the flow of time convinces them of the need to continue their struggle for the future:-

Ah would dae it again. Ah would dae it again. Ah would dae it again, tomorrow. Ah've got tae fight fur this industry fur ma son.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN.

## CONCLUSION.

11.1 Introduction.

The study has sought to engage with the problems commonly identified with traditional approaches to the analysis of class consciousness. It has been argued that, as a subjective phenomenon, these are profound, as it is both hard to classify and operationalise. Much of the existing literature has been both simplistic and static. In relation to the first criticism, it has been argued that accounts have tended to oversimplify the diversity of beliefs, even among radical groups, and to assume too uncritically the relationship between objective and subjective conditions. These issues are bound up with what are to count as valid expressions of consciousness and active expressions of class interests. The problems in this area are concerned with the relationship between objective and subjective conditions of existence, and the importance of the overtly political spheres of beliefs in the production of radical consciousness. The second criticism relates to the lack of historical perception within accounts of consciousness, which fail to examine the ways in which understandings of the past inform action in the present.

It has been argued that a more fruitful approach is enter the field with a theoretical framework which, rather than predetermining the content and direction of actors' beliefs, enables one to grasp the fluidity and complexity of subjective experience and its relationship to the material world over time. To this end, the heavily-laden term 'class consciousness' has been rejected in favour of the less politically emotive one of 'radical consciousness', which has been taken broadly to encompass those expressions of opposition to dominant structural social arrangements and relationships.



At an empirical level, an attempt has been made to avoid the analysis of events by the imputation that actors are necessarily pursuing 'class interests', which, it is believed, tends to confuse rather than reveal by simplistically inferring that actions are motivated by class awareness of what Lockwood calls 'extra-systemic' ends, [Rose, (ed.), 1988]. Instead, concentration has been placed upon the mechanisms involved in the formation and reproduction of radical consciousness, and how objective and subjective conditions interact over time, in order to understand more fully how actors relate the objective world to their sense of personal identity and understandings, and through this come to radical stances; that is, the analysis has sought to locate radical consciousness within the flow of time rather than disengage it from history.

The conceptualisation of time is doubly important within the study, for it is utilised on two levels. Firstly, it is seen as the temporal progression of events within which successive generations locate their lives. Secondly, it is viewed as situated history; the use of a sense of the past involved in the creation of identity and consciousness. Crucially related to this is the located nature of subjective understandings, in that actors experience their present, and mobilise their past, within given spatial settings. Thus, the concept of a 'radical region' has been drawn upon to illustrate how radical consciousness is situated within a given locality over time.

In order to operationalise these assumptions, analysis was made of a radical group, the Fife miners, who inhabit a region which has manifested such characteristics over time, and emphasis was laid mainly upon the industrially and politically organised to seek to reveal the processes involved. Thus the sample chosen was not, nor was it meant to be, 'typical' of the broader group of which it was a subset. Rather, it was believed that emphasis should be laid upon identifying the mechanisms involved in creating and perpetuating radical identities, and the meanings these hold for actors, in order that one could extrapolate from this the



differences between the radical and non-radical elements of the sample. These latter, therefore, played a minor role, a comparative group against which to measure the uniqueness, or not, of the radical sample. It is to a summary of the conclusions drawn that we now turn.

### 11.2 The Basis of Identification and Belief among the Miners.

Initially, one needed to identify those factors underlying the world view of the miners; that is, the objective elements within their lives from which beliefs and identity are formulated. Four main areas were found to be central. The first of these was the occupational concerns and outlooks which develop from the miners' nature of employment. This, it was argued, was founded upon the constant potentiality of danger and hardship of conditions underground which called forth the necessity of a mutualistic and collectivistic outlook to experiences confronting the miners.

These qualities are held to be important for both old and young miners, for despite the technological changes associated with greater mechanisation which have relieved much of the manual burden in the pits, at the end of the day they are still seen as dirty holes in the ground which are apt to throw problems and accidents in the way of workers. As such, therefore, this factor in consciousness formation has a timeless quality in that the qualities miners need and value are bound up with the actualities of what are, in many ways, fundamentally unchanging conditions underground. This is the only element which has this quality, for in the other three factors, one can identify changes which are serving to weaken the content of the legacy.

The second of the four main factors is that of the mining community, and thus serves to instill the cultural identity of the miners. This, following the work of Cohen [1985], was portrayed as being a community of the mind which, through its insular and bounded nature creates a strong sense both of the group, and those who stand outwith the group. Miners understand who they are



through their perceptions of others within the community, and through ideas of the light in which they feel themselves to be held by non-miners. It is therefore largely an identity by commonality and comparison.

As such, unlike the beliefs formulated in relation to the nature of employment, this element is not founded purely within objective conditions, but is based on the perceived impressions of others; that is, whilst there is a major experiential element based upon the quality and necessities of life within mining communities, a large part of the miners' sense of self relates to impressionistic assumptions about the wider society. This qualitative aspect becomes more apparent in contemporary historical circumstances in which, despite the perceived objective decline in the industry with its resultant consequences for the spatio-temporally located communities in a physical sense, there may still be seen to be a strong awareness of this imagined community, which exists as the typification of a way of life; a transcendental value system encapsulating ideals about life which miners are seen to be upholding in a hostile environment. The third element contains aspects of both of those so far mentioned in that, whilst subject to material change in form, beliefs about industrial relations have a continuity over time.

The third mechanism held to be central to identity and belief is that of the relations between management and the miners' unions, and is, as such, concerned with industrial organisation. This is held to engender black-and-white views of power structures which are fundamentally both oppositional and conflictual. The history of the mining industry, both under private ownership and nationalisation, is perceived as being one of continual struggle both to defend existing conditions and to gain improvements. To ensure these ends it is believed that the miners' unions must have the strength that membership loyalty alone can provide. Yet whilst this qualitative aspect to union strength is seen as unchanging in Fife, the quantitative aspect is held to have greatly weakened the unions. This has manifested itself in two



ways; firstly, that the decline of the industry has eroded the miners' strength within the labour movement as a whole, and secondly, that recent years have witnessed a new orientation in managerial processes associated with control and profitability, which have acted to reintroduce a greater perception of conflict in industrial relations.

Again, one may perceive a contradiction, for whilst objective circumstances may have weakened and demoralised the miners, confronted with what they see as a hostile management, there may still be found a subjective commitment to the union and strong oppositional attitudes. As such, despite quantitative decline, this factor is still strong in facilitating identity and belief. These three factors, therefore, are held to provide a strong group identity for the miners although subject to changing historical periods. There is an essential continuity of experience in these areas which provides a similarity in outlooks between different historical generations. Occupationally, culturally and on the level of industrial organisation, the world of the miners is held to engender orientations which have been described as an 'immanent socialism'; that is, collectivistic, oppositional attitudes and identity which are rooted within spatio-temporally located circumstances. These factors show the miners who they are and who others are, whether non-miners or management, and, as such, constitute descriptive mechanisms. Yet they are not, as Lockwood [1975] would argue, merely social images, but are, as Westergaard [1975] suggests, implicitly political. It is, therefore, the particularistic form in which these elements has been articulated which is crucial to political beliefs among the miners, and it is this last factor which thus provides an important key to the understanding of Fife's radicalism.

The fourth mechanism which has been identified as central to the self-perceptions of the Fife miners differs from the previous three in that it is not integral to the mining industry *per se*, but is specific to the development of the industry in the county; that is, that of the particular manifestation of political



organisation, which is closely tied to the industrial organisation resultant upon relations in the mining industry. Whilst the other mechanisms lay the foundation for the production of a radical identity, and the content of these historical experiences the means of the legacy of the Fife miners, it is the activities of the Communist Party in Fife which is responsible for the systematisation of these experiential factors into a politically-articulated world view over time. Further, the active role played by Party members within the county means that communism is also part of the objective history of the Fife miners. As such, the Party provides a dual role; firstly, it enables the miners to make sense of the experiences of the other three factors by setting them within an explicitly formulated philosophy adequate to the collectivistic and oppositional perceptions of the miners and, secondly, by perpetuating this over time the Party has played a vital role in the totality of historical experience within the region in the spheres of work, community and industrial organisation. It is part of the cultural repertoire mobilised in time, which acts as a political and experiential precedent.

Thus the Communist Party is central to the radicalism of the Fife miners on two levels, by being a vehicle for radical expression and by providing the leadership which, at the same time as propagating communist beliefs, served to become the major form of political organisation among the miners. This is not to say that this role could not have been played by another socialist philosophy or organisation capable of systemising the miners' experiences, nor that radicals do not exist in Fife outwith the Party, but merely that it was the Communist Party who captured the initiative within the region during its early years and gave direction and leadership to the miners' thoughts and struggles. As such, communist beliefs constitute an interactive factor in the form and content of the legacy of radical belief in Fife. In so doing, it enables us to understand the qualities and beliefs the miners upheld, as Party leadership was both sought, and sought itself to embody the transcendental value system of the miners;



that is, that they were viewed, and viewed themselves, in terms of a master status of ideal standards.

It is this last factor, therefore, which enables us to grasp the arguments of Parkin [1971], which stress the necessity of a 'radical meaning system' to translate working-class thought into a coherent set of beliefs. Yet, further, the grounding of the Party's activities within the locality serves to emphasise the spatial aspects to radical consciousness; that is, that politics were based firmly within the specific concerns of the wider social group; that is, the mining communities. It is the politicisation of the Fife miners which transformed the county into what Cooke [1984] calls a 'radical region'.

Whilst there are doubtless other factors of significance involved in the formulation of identity and belief, these four factors are held to be central to the ways in which these have manifested themselves over time within Fife. Yet they serve two other functions for in addition to constituting the form of understandings of the self and group in the present, they are also both the means for thought and self-perception to be perpetuated over time, through interaction in these spheres, and the content of what is known of the Fife miners' world; that is, they are the major mechanisms through which consciousness and identity are reproduced in changing spatio-temporal circumstances, and, at the same time, the sum of local knowledge. What is significant is the close interrelationship of all four mechanisms within the totality of experience of the Fife miners historically, for they acted mutually to reinforce the particularistic world view developed in the Fife coalfield. Further, it is the role of these mechanisms in history which provides a crucial insight to the study of the complexity and dynamism of radical consciousness.

### 11.3 The Content and Reproduction of the Legacy.

Whilst foundations for consciousness are rooted within the objective concerns of the present, it has been argued that



historical perception plays a vital role in the understandings the miners have of themselves and the world which they inhabit; for it is drawn upon to make coherent and to explain the circumstances of their lives. Yet if the present is made sense of in terms of the past, what Bauman [1982] calls 'class memory', this is a 'significant past'. This term is taken to signify that the history so used is not 'objective' in any merely factual way, but is one which highlights and encapsulates areas of importance within those factors indicated as crucial to the production of the miners' basic, unsystematised world view in the present. The history drawn upon provides, as Thompson [1978] states, the meaning of the story; it is a history of the essential. As has been stated, this characterisation of the world is essentially mutualistic and conflictual, and thus it is those elements within the significant past which are most frequently articulated to make sense of themselves and society. Past solidarities, struggles, loyalties and betrayals are called upon to offer an explanation of the miners' world; it is the expression of order conceptualised within Heller's [1982] theory of 'unreflected generality'. The legacy is the interactive process between past and present: it is a social construction placed upon the past. The abstract world view is rendered coherent in terms of the particular and the known.

Consequently, it is the historical development of the miners' experiences within the areas of work, community, and industrial and political organisation locally which are the source from which this significant historical legacy is mobilised. As such, this legacy relates directly to the radical region itself and expresses the sum of what is regarded as significant in the geographical and occupational history of the miners within the county. Yet this does not exist outwith the individual, as Williams [1985] informed us, but is tied into the miners' lives through biographical, familial history; that is, put simply, that it is not just a particular history of the Fife miners but is 'my' history, and the history of the group is expressed through the personal experiences of those whose families took part in past



events, having been passed down through the generations. Therefore, the occupational, communal, industrial and political histories interact directly with personal beliefs and identity and, through subsequent experiences, serve mutually to reinforce each other. In this way the region's radical past becomes very much part of the miners' sense of self in the present. Thus, we can see that the mechanisms are held to be both the content and means of reproduction of the legacy, for it is the events within these areas which are drawn upon to make sense of the world yet, transmitted within the locality, it is through social interaction in these spheres that the perpetuation of this knowledge takes place. Yet if this highlights the spatial quality of the mechanisms, one must also make reference to temporal elements.

If the significant history of the miners, that is, the particular reconstruction placed upon the past, is a general pool of resources from which to understand the present then, most obviously, what needs to be made sense of will vary in different historical circumstances; that is, it is utilised in 'situated history'. The timeless past is thus drawn upon in time and space for particular purposes, in order to understand and deal with current concerns. It is this aspect which allows for the modification and reinterpretation over time of the historical legacy as different situations require the miners to draw understandings to deal with these. Consequently, the legacy evolves over time. This is not to argue that the past is no longer relevant, for the utilisation of the legacy attests that it is, but that objective conditions change in their particular manifestation; for example, strikes still require solidarity, organisation, commitment etc., yet unlike in the 1920s, for example, now one has to deal with the DHSS, media or whatever. Thus whilst the principles remain the same, factors needing attention may not. The legacy is, in this way, a dynamic phenomenon, for it is used in changing temporal circumstances, for changing needs. This very dynamism, however, and the crucial interrelationships between the content and means of the legacy,



spatio-temporal circumstances and personal identity may be as great a weakness as they have been a strength.

#### 11.4 Weaknesses Revealed.

It is historical circumstances themselves which are fundamentally affecting the ability of the legacy to continue its reproduction by undermining the mechanisms for consciousness formation. The decline in the industry, and consequently, the communities have necessarily served to weaken both the unions and the Communist Party, which was so firmly rooted within the pits. As such, the previous strength of mutually reinforcing mechanisms are now revealed as major weaknesses, for the radical consciousness of the Fife miners, and the ability to perpetuate this, was crucially tied to the strength of the industry. The narrowing of the mining base in the county is thus not merely an objective change for, by acting as a crucial conduit for consciousness formation, it has consequences for radical beliefs and identities.

The general social factors identified as mechanisms for consciousness reproduction were consequently located in present concerns in order to examine how identity and consciousness interact with objective circumstances. These issues were revealed by the discussion of the '84-85 strike for whilst the radical tradition was mobilised during the strike due to its continuing presence within living memory, it served to highlight the disjuncture between the radical legacy and contemporary actuality. The strike brought into question the relevance of the social, industrial and political legacy as its ability to withstand the assault became central to the potentiality for miners to sustain the strike. In doing so, historical change became increasingly apparent, as did the declining force of the major mechanisms. Further, the removal of the industrial contest to the national level revealed the inability of the radical region to affect the total outcome; for the discourse was formulated in a period in which local strength could affect industrial decisions. For the Communist Party this transition is of crucial importance for its



historical strength lay in its success in conducting struggle at the local level, and it must now seek to establish new ways to progress.

These contradictions between the legacy and present conditions have gained significance since the strike as the area continued to decline, and great differences became increasingly highlighted between the miners' outlooks. Whilst radicalisation took place for many younger men and radicalism was reinforced for radicals, demoralisation grew among the non-radical section of the sample. As such, this would indicate that a systematised world view enabled radicals to transcend the totality of the experience of defeat. Of central importance to this ability is the perception of time. Whilst the miners had been beguiled by past visions of strength which became transparently inapplicable during and after the strike, it would appear that it is the ability to visualise a future from this defeat which most clearly separates the radical from non-radical sections of the sample, all of whom are now attempting to create a new life in the aftermath.

#### 11.5 Radicals in History.

It is in relation to how and why actors respond to their experiences that the sample was placed upon a radical/non-radical continuum, and key factors examined as to individuals' backgrounds, in order to assess the relationship between background, politics and response. It was discovered that the most significant difference appeared to be that the most radical elements of the sample were those most closely tied both to Fife and the mining industry. Yet, these differences must not be over-stated, for in many ways there was little distinction between beliefs. This must be seen as due to the relativity of using the term 'non-radical' for the politically-unaligned miners; all of whom were tied to the legacy in some way. Certainly, if placed in relation to other types of workers, or miners in other areas, such men may be seen as being radicals by comparison. All miners, except the communists who displayed a simple, but solidly



conflictual view of society, displayed a complexity of response; sometimes offering strongly oppositional statements, sometimes not. As such, there was an overall similarity between the men in certain areas. Yet whilst similar views may have been expressed, the differences between the miners lay in the depth of knowledge held on key topics, and the ways in which views were expressed.

It has been seen that perceptions of time are of vital importance to the creation of beliefs and identity, for actors tie themselves into their worlds, and thus understand themselves in terms of what has gone before, on both a personal and social level. For the Fife miners, however, this past is also overtly political, for the selective class memory is acting to reproduce radical values associated with past conflicts and industrial mobilisation in the county. Yet there are differences in the degree to which this history manifests itself in the miners' world views. Thus, what is of interest among the Fife miners is how, and the extent to which, the different elements within the sample perceived time.

There were fundamental similarities in the ways in which the men saw their past. Among those without a politicised world view there could also be found perceptions of the Fife miners as an historically militant group. As with their more political fellows, non-aligned miners also saw their history in terms of both mutuality and conflict, and had an overall identification with this history. What distinction there was displayed itself in a lesser awareness of the activities of the past than could be found among the politically articulate. Their knowledge was less detailed and could thus be seen as characterising Heller's 'unreflected generality'; that is, it was a coherent world view, but one which lacked a sense of purpose and direction, as can be found within her concept of 'unreflected universality'.

Among the politically articulate could be found evidence of both types of historical orientation. They, too, expressed a similar understanding of their past, but there was a greater degree of historical knowledge. What appeared to be the case was whilst



objective conditions in the past and present may lay the foundations for the development of radical consciousness, the systematisation of radical belief then acts to interpret that past within the framework of the belief system. Yet, at the same time, the political framework draws upon that past as a body of examples, warnings or whatever; it is a past of practical events which are fitted into the belief system. In this way past and present are mutually reinforcing; the past laying the framework for radical consciousness but being interpreted in such a way as to legitimise present views. It is for this reason that radicals were those expressing greater historical interest, for the past is seen as one of continuing relevance; conflict and opposition are seen as characterising past and present with little overall change in class relations. Yet radicals also displayed both purpose and direction in their beliefs.

A greater concern with the potentialities of the future, and beliefs that this could bring a renewed viability to their industry could be found among the politically-aligned. It was here that the differences between the two elements was at its most striking, for it indicated how a coherently-formulated world view could enable actors both to analyse their circumstances and from this draw out the requirements of their future. Among non-aligned men could be found a lesser ability to articulate both past and present, and little vision of a better future. It was among such men that we discovered feelings of powerlessness, pessimism and demoralisation, whereas, among radical miners, these feelings were less intense. Closely tied to this was a perception to be found among radicals of what Giddens [1979] would call the 'dialectic of control'. Although non-radicals could envisualise no future which would bring strength back to the miners and their industry, the politically articulate both had a vision and a faith in this possibility, for they perceived their industrial fortunes in terms of changing levels of power and control over time. Regarding the changing industrial fortunes of the miners in the past, they can extrapolate from this to anticipate a return to strength in the future. This awareness, when coupled with a political vision of



alternative social arrangements, thus enables certain individuals to sustain a commitment to a mining future when others can merely see a broken industry and union. As such, whilst radical consciousness is in many ways backward-looking, as Barrington Moore [1978] argues, it crucially depends on an ability to locate oneself in the flow of time, and as Westergaard states, to have a vision of the future. The perception of time - past, present and future - is thus the most crucial distinguishing feature between radicals and non-radicals.

Thus, in accordance with Popitz et al [1957], we can see that articulation plays a key role in workers' ability to make sense of the world. Yet if radicals are able to continue to articulate the radical ethos, they do so under great pressure. The erosion of the material base creates difficulties in sustaining and broadening the world view both among existing supporters and potential recruits. Neither can local campaigns to fight for the industry gain much credence when decisions about the future of the pits are made in London. Thus whilst the objective conditions of decline are ones which may be held to be conducive to radicalisation, the mechanisms to promote such beliefs are weak. The numerical weakness of the miners, their fragmentation into the non-mining communities, and their distance from the locations of decision-making means they are not in a position to exert control over their destinies. In such circumstances it is hard to put beliefs into practice. The world is outwith their control.

Yet within the radical region there is still the potentiality for a growth in politically-systemised thought. Despite the erosion of the material base within the mining industry, the continuing presence of those sympathetic to the ideals and interests of the miners, as attested to in the support for the strike locally, and the grounding of radicals within local settlements means that activists are still, though to a lesser extent than formally, embedded in Fife communities. Their continuing activities in local campaigns, Community Councils or whatever provides the possibilities of a rerooting of radical ideas on a wider, and



thereby perhaps stronger, base than when grounded within the mining industry. Further, as miners leave the industry and become absorbed into different industries there develops the potential for radical beliefs, whether communist or socialist, to establish themselves in a whole variety of areas. As such, we can see the ways in which, as Cooke argues, radicalism may extend beyond the period in which it was initially enabled by the productive base. Thus, whilst one may have seen the end of a radical tradition associated mainly with the mining industry, it is possible that this will reestablish itself on a transformed basis within the region after the period of dislocation ends. To ensure this, however, will require the development of new mechanisms capable of providing the means for the production and reproduction of the radical discourse, and that this can both render coherent and provide the means of dealing with, the new actualities.

To sum up, the analysis has focused on an area of radicalism which is currently under great assault from the wider society, as all of its established mechanisms for the reproduction of a radical legacy face dislocation in the wake of structural change. In many senses we have been dealing with radicals in a non-radical world. Yet though under threat, we have found a continued commitment both to radical ideals and the mining industry. The problem, therefore, given the objective circumstances of the Fife miners, is how radicals manage to be so in a hostile climate. In many senses the difficulty has been the reverse from the usual problem; that is, working-class radicalism, as opposed to quiescence, is the phenomenon needing to be explained. The miners studied are in many ways isolated in the present political climate; a vanguard seeking to articulate a radical ethos in a non-radical world. The men interviewed were finding it hard to sustain political motivation in the wake of industrial decline and defeat, yet their ability to continue would appear to derive from that radical world view, for it provided the faith to overcome demoralisation. Consequently, we need to explore what insights this gives us into the issues involved in the study of radical consciousness, and what avenues might be fruitfully pursued in the future.



### 11.6 Back to the Drawing Board.

The study has served to indicate the problematics involved with the analysis of subjective phenomena. Radical consciousness is essentially complex and, therefore, hard to classify. This, it is believed, shows us that, as Davis [1979] argues, ideal typologies such as that of Lockwood, are inadequate to a full explanation. It has been seen that among the sample of Fife miners interviewed there were varying degrees of political belief to be found both within and between actors, even within a clearly-defined radical group. Thus, the imputation of simplistic master statuses has little credibility even in an occupational and regional group which has 'objectively' displayed militant characteristics. It is in this sense that the work of Giddens, outlined in Chapter One has been useful; for it allows us to conceptualise human action as being both recursive and purposive, yet located within degrees of constraint which change over time. The greater complexity for which this allows has been used to illustrate how it may enhance understandings of subjective phenomena. Consequently, instead of concentrating on the construction of definitions which may be constricting rather than enabling, it may be more fruitful to focus attention on the forces affecting the ability of actors to create and sustain opposition to dominant political beliefs.

Here also the analysis has highlighted the difficulties of imputing simplistic associations between objective and subjective conditions for action. Whilst it is believed that the subjective is developed in relation to experience in the objective world, it is not held, in a crudely Marxist fashion, that there is a simple correlation between employment experience and consciousness, but that activities within the cultural, industrial, and overtly political spheres of life are also central to consciousness formation. Beliefs are formed from the complex interplay of forces which provide a multi-layered framework upon which consciousness is produced, yet this does not result purely from lived experience but is the consequence also of the decisions taken by actors to gain some measure of control over their lives, and from their



perceptions of social arrangements. Thus, for example, whilst it can be seen that experiences of work are central to the world view of the miners, this does not relate purely to the objective living through of that work, but to the strategies actors create in order to come to terms with it.

This process is also true of the communal aspects of the miners' lives where mutuality has developed in order for the collectivity to deal with crises confronting it. Again, we have seen how definitions of self and others are formed in relation to the perceived images of others through the presence of a community of the mind, and how this may affect attitudes and, thus, courses of action. As such, it is agreed with Price [1982] that consciousness develops from the totality of working-class experience, but that this is mediated through the intervention of actors, both on a concrete and perceptual level, in the objective world, rather than merely being reflected in consciousness. It thus also indicates, in accordance with Davis, how the realm of imagery may affect consciousness and action and that, consequently, one must also pay attention to the perceptual. It is in this sense that Giddens' theorisation of choice within constraint may be utilised, for it shows how beliefs derive from the knowledgeability and capability of actors. It also allows, following Moorhouse [1978], for an understanding of how the pragmatism of the working class may influence potential outcomes: in that choices for action may indicate not merely a particular configuration of objective forces but the calculated decision to choose a certain course from various alternatives dependent upon the assessment of likely success of goals.

Within such a conceptualisation, therefore, the systemisation of fundamental world views does not appear to be imposed upon actors, the insertion of the political onto people's lives, but flows from that very actuality. In relation to this, for example, we have seen how much of the miners' attitudes and self-images, following Sennett and Cobb [1977], derive from the experience of work, which creates feelings of self-worth based in collective



responsibility. It is in this way that the mechanisms referred to above are crucially interrelated. For whilst objective conditions in Fife have been articulated by a radical world view this was not necessarily a 'natural' conclusion: that is, although the mechanisms contained the possibility of such a formulation, this did not inevitably lead to such an end, but resulted from the availability of a radical ethos which was able to form a close correlation with the values of the existing mechanisms and which gained credence from its relevance to these. However, once this relationship was forged, the level of the political, as both Stedman Jones [1983] and Panitch [1986] have argued, gains a momentum of its own which, as we have seen, is now continuing to prevail despite the erosion of the objective conditions from which it gained its original credibility. It is the perpetuation of this political world view which enables the miners to engage in a critique of social arrangements. Such circumstances would serve to throw into doubt Davis' arguments that social imagery is necessarily incomplete, static and lacking coherence, for it is the unification of spatio-temporal and political factors which facilitates this.

It is perhaps the location of the miners within time and space which provides the most important indices for the ways forward for works on consciousness, whether radical or otherwise. As has been seen, the concept of a radical region utilised by Cooke appears to have great applicability to the study for it enables one to conceptualise the ways in which individuals may be related to the wider history of the geographical and social units. What has been explored is the means through which the experiential interrelationship between the personal and spatially-located group operates. Central to this has been the rooting of individual identity into the radical region through familial history, which indicated that it is a way of assimilating the history of the miners in Fife into personal identity. Yet if the spatial elements are of vital concern in relating individuals to the region, the temporal aspects which the study has examined are also



central to the ability for this instilling of identity to be perpetuated over time.

Time has played an important part of the analysis undertaken, for it has indicated the centrality of historical understanding to consciousness formation. As we have seen historical memory acts as a structural property among the Fife miners, a pool of resources from which identity, example and values may be drawn, and which serves to connect miners into the collectivity in the past/present/future continuum. Historical events, patterns and values act beyond the time of formulation to structure the world view of actors in later periods, and through their awareness of this past, brings them to an awareness of the future also.

The particular nature of this past in Fife indicates the crucial relationship between history and radicalism as has been displayed by the ways in which a significant history is drawn upon in situated history; that is, the historical present. The partial use of the past in time and space acts both to legitimise the past and the present as oppositional, and highlights a value system which still considers its historical past as of continuing relevance. The content of the historical legacy still makes sense to the Fife miners, despite industrial and communal decline, due to the continuity of the traditions of work, community and union which are the essence of their selective view of the past. The use of history as a perceptual mechanism is thus central to the miners' sense of identity and consciousness. This drawing upon the past helps to reveal what Giddens refers to as the essentially recursive nature of social action. Yet though recursive we have also seen how action is transformed over time by changing historical events, as actors make choices and decisions within the constraints of the temporal continuum.

It is this perception and utilisation of time displayed by the miners which is perhaps the most important indicator of the failure of traditional approaches to consciousness, for Marxist theory underestimates the importance of an historical awareness



to identity, thought and action. The simplistic relationship assumed between objective and subjective conditions for action is largely responsible for this as, relating individuals or classes merely to the conditions of the present, it fails to perceive the importance of time in the acting out of the potential futures to which actors either carry themselves or see themselves to be inexorably carried. It is thus in many ways essentially ahistorical.

The study undertaken thus provides important indicators for the direction of future works in the area of subjective understandings, although, as is the nature of such tasks, it has perhaps thrown up more questions than answers. Of consequence has been the analysis of the ways in which spatio-temporally located mechanisms have provided a crucial source of the world view of the Fife miners and from which has developed a legacy of radicalism; for it has shown us the complexity of the factors from which a radical world view may be articulated. Yet it is the interrelationship between these over time which is the most significant element, for it provides us with a means of understanding both the strengths and weaknesses of the interplay of these in changing historical circumstances as actors are confronted by a constantly evolving actuality. Yet if historically changing objective conditions have placed the ability of the Fife miners to perpetuate their radicalism under severe assault, and thus weakened their ability to maintain their identity and beliefs, it is also their history which will provide them with their greatest source of strength in the fight to sustain these in the future.



## EPILOGUE.

On January 11th 1988 Fife's last pit, Seafield Colliery in Kirkcaldy, was finally closed. In the three years since the end of the national strike BC had consistently failed to give assurances that the pit had a future. By the time of the announcement the majority of the workforce, wearied by the insecurity and uncertainty of their employment, were eager to accept voluntary redundancy. A campaign, mounted by activists, to keep the pit open was of no avail. Currently, a continuing campaign is being fought to secure the redevelopment of the nearby Frances Colliery; which project had been used to gain the men's compliance in the closure of Seafield. At the time of writing, BC has made no conclusive affirmation of their intent in this regard.



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16. 300 collieries were closed and 30 merged between 1957-65, and over 200 were closed between 1965-69. (JACKSON, M.P., [1974], p. 108).
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24. "The management personnel consisted mainly of those who had worked for the private coal-owners and former officers from the armed services. Neither group was particularly committed to the idea of nationalisation, though a few favoured a radically re-organised industry and saw nationalisation as a means of achieving this. The nationalised industry, of course, had no alternative but to employ managers from privately owned collieries. There was no other source." (ALLEN, V.L., [1981], p. 102).
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19. e.g., Willie Watson, Labour MP for Dunfermline burghs in 1938.
20. ROTH, G., & C. WITTICH, (eds.), [1978], p. 245.
21. The opposite is argued by Salaman when he claims, "... radical consciousness does seem to be based very frequently on occupational groups: it develops as a response to deterioration in conditions and circumstances, which is then generalised to other groups." (SALAMAN, G., [1974], p. 122).

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2. ADENEY M., & J. LLOYD, [1986], p. 93.



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6. On 16th May 1987 Seafield was meeting 90% [12,600 tonnes] of its production target, by 18th July 1987 this had dropped to 58.2% [8,150 tonnes].

7. SCOTTISH COALFIELD PROJECT, [1987a], p. 12.

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348  
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